

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

October 15, 2025

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams and Med Ed 201

MINUTES

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

Absent: Dwight Matthews

Call to Order: Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:10pm

1. Minutes of September 17, 2025, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
 - a. Faculty Senate report (Mara) The Faculty Senate most recently met on September 22, 2025. The following summarizes topics covered (as always, full Senate minutes and associated materials are available through the Senate website):
 - i. Senate President Abby McGowan introduced the Faculty Senate Ombudsperson, Keith Burt, Associate Professor of Psychological Sciences. Keith is a neutral party, and independent of the Faculty Senate Office and the University Administration. He is available to consult on any issues concerning UVM faculty in resolving conflicts. He can be reached at Keith.Burt@uvm.edu [Note: Keith is available to retired faculty and has served as an important resource to retirees]
 - ii. As part of the Consent agenda, a new PhD in Computational Studies of Culture and Society was approved. Prof. Pablo Bose reported that two new faculty (Anthropology and Linguistics) have been hired through grant funding.
 - iii. University Strategic Planning: Katie Shepherd, Dean of the College of Education and Social Services, and chair of the 2025 Strategic Planning Committee. Thus far, the Committee is gathering input for elaboration on four draft "Pillars" or goals: "1) Forge Bold Futures: Community, Purpose & Path for our Students. 2) Study What Matters: Values-driven Research & Teaching that Impacts the World. 3) Open Every Door: Access, Engagement & Partnerships. 4) Fostering Excellence: People, Systems & Infrastructure." Vetting of the "Pillars" will be followed by delineation of strategies, tactics, and metrics. In addition, the University's vision and mission statements are being considered for revision and updating.
 - iv. Faculty Senate Committee Updates: The Senate Financial and Physical Planning Committee and the Catamount Core Curriculum Committee (responsible for the General Education requirements for undergraduate students) each gave routine updates on their respective committee's work and solicited faculty input.
 - b. United Academics update (Beth)
 - i. UA has filed a step 3 grievance (university level) and met with the Provost, who has 15 days to respond. UA cannot represent (or grieve for) non-active faculty and the grievance, currently, is not on the content/changes of the plan, but on procedure. The grievance is about UA not being able to evaluate what the university is doing, arguing that the university did not give them complete info as required by Article 20.1 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Evidently UBAC has no by-laws, does not record minutes and appears to have a governance problem. In contrast the Health Insurance Working Group has functioned well and has benefited our members.

- ii. Further grievances may or may not follow, but the advantage of this strategy is that it affords the opportunity for access to all sorts of info on the plan, the process, and the most important actors.
 - iii. Retirees should not delay enrollment in a health plan pending a grievance resolution.
 - iv. UA has reached a MOU on increasing bridge funding for those who have recently lost grant funding.
- c. Discussion of the status of the Medicare insurance transition and the role of the RFAO. Chair Gurdon introduced the discussion by saying that the RFAO Board needs to consider its role and develop an action plan.
 - i. Judging from correspondence on the member forum and list-serv there is a need for FAQs for members that include questions that have been posed on the RFAO forum and during information sessions. The pages should be updated frequently, as questions emerge. Evidently HR and VIA are working on FAQs, but the RFAO can develop its own and also review the FAQs produced by HR and VIA prior to distribution. The FAQs need to be clear, “crisp”, how-to documents.
 - ii. Possible topics include:
 - 1. How Medicare works. There is some misinformation among members. The sense of the Board was that there is good information available already.
 - 2. Getting the process to work: signing onto the VIA website, entering profile information, and reviewing health and pharmacy insurance plans. This is an immediate need and where the Board should focus.
 - 3. Relationship of enrollment in Plan D to VIA
 - 4. The availability of BC/BS policies to members in Vermont
 - 5. Questions about the HRAs: how funds flow and what the funds can be used for.
 - 6. The Board’s role in monitoring enrollment
 - 7. The encouragement of members to enroll by Thanksgiving because the University will be on break in December. Those who are having problems enrolling on the portal should be encouraged to enroll by telephone.
 - 8. The RFAO’s role for staff retirees, who have no list-serv and more limited access to information.
 - iii. As a starting point Ralph Budd and Alison Pechenick will draft a FAQ with technical tips for using the VIA portal. This will be distributed to Board members for comment and suggestions.
 - iv. The Board again expressed concern about how disabled members will be helped with enrollment. They felt it would be useful if HR provided periodic, perhaps weekly, updates on enrollment.
 - v. The RFAO is not a recognized University governance or advisory body, and as such cannot initiate grievances or formally engage in negotiations on behalf of its members. However, the Board can provide information about the grievance process. United Academics also cannot represent retired members. Members who consider filing a grievance must use the University process first. However, there are limitations on who the ombudsman can represent. RFAO is organized as an advocacy group for a subset of retirees, and in this role, it is able voice questions and concerns to the University regarding changes to member benefits and seek resolution.
- d. Details of the Annual General Meeting (on November 14th) and election reminder:
 - i. Dr David Churchill, CTO at Beta Technologies, was invited to speak.
 - ii. Five Board members are up for re-election and were asked by Chair Gurdon to decide whether they plan to stand for election. An alternative offered was to continue to serve in

an *ex officio* capacity. There is no specific limit to the number of *ex officio* Board members. Chair Gurdon moved that Rachel Johnson, Lee Thompson and Alison Pechenick could move to an *ex officio* role if they chose to, the motion was seconded by Ralph Budd and passed. Richard Branda said that he did not plan to seek re-election to the Board and as Secretary Treasurer.

- iii. Chair Gurdon will send out a call for nominations soon and will ask that nominees provide a brief expression of interest in the Board.
- e. Motion to establish an "Events and Speakers" standing committee. Chair Gurdon noted that the RFAO should have a regular educational component that will provide outreach to our members from the Board. This may be in person, electronically, or most likely both. Chair Gurdon moved that a committee be formed, Ralph Budd seconded the motion and it passed. Judy Van Houten and Ralph Budd volunteered to serve as members.
- f. Request for volunteers to review submissions to the Retired Scholars Award Program. There are currently 3 applications to consider for funding and adequate funding is available. Lee Thompson, Alan Gotlieb, Ralph Budd and Taka Ashikaga will form a committee for the review.
- g. Other business: None

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for: November 14, 2025, the Annual General Meeting

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda