

## RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

January 21, 2026

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

### MINUTES

Attending: Michael Gurdon, Mara Saule, Alison Pechenick, Ruth Farrell, Claire Burlingham, Gary Derr, Taka Ashikaga, Dwight Matthews, Alan Gotlieb, Jay Ashman, Beth Mintz, Judith Van Houten

1. Minutes of the December 17, 2025 meeting were approved.
2. Report on the United Academics meetings: Beth Mintz indicated that there was nothing that would impact UVM retirees.
3. Report on UBAC: Ruth Farrell reported on the UBAC Update to the RFAO Exec Board - 1/21/2026. Her report follows.

The UBAC met twice since the last RFAO board meeting, on December 18<sup>th</sup> and on January 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### December Meeting:

- A. The Council elected Holly Zanes, retired staff representative, as chair with a two-year term limit. Genevieve Anthony agreed to act as secretary.
- B. Priorities for the coming year: (Caitlyn)
- C. Review the PPO1 plan for current employees and recommend changes for plan design: There have been no changes in the plan for many years and HR is considering whether it is time to update the plan and make it a better option – perhaps more in reach – for more employees.
- D. Research the addition of voluntary health benefits for current employees:
  - a. These are optional, employee-paid, plans to help cover out-of-pocket costs that an employer's primary health insurance doesn't cover – filling in the gaps. Examples include accident insurance that pays additional costs for injuries from covered accidents, critical illness insurance that provides additional coverage for major illnesses, and hospital indemnity that offers daily cash for hospital stays. These plans are usually offered through employers, allowing for discounted rates and payroll deduction for premiums. They often pay cash directly to those enrolled.
- E. Simplify long-term disability and life insurance with the goal of offering better benefits at lower costs.
- F. Working Group assignments: For the spring semester, the Health Insurance Working Group will take on the review of PPO1 and a separate working group will take on voluntary health benefits and the simplification of long-term disability and life insurance.

#### January UBAC Meeting:

- A. Updates: (Caitlyn)
  - a. CHRO Search: The search for the new CHRO has launched and it is expected that applications will be available to review in February/March.
  - b. Move to Medicare Marketplace: At the close of 2025 there were approximately 40 Medicare-eligible retirees enrolled in the 2025 VBA group plan that did not enroll through Via Benefits and were non-responsive to inquiries and follow-up by HR. HR is continuing efforts to reach out to these individuals during the first two months of 2026 and continues to have the option of covering them if needed.
- B. UBAC Website: The Council discussed creating a small ad hoc group to work on updating the UBAC website, listing current priorities, providing opportunities for feedback, listing openings for membership, etc.

- C. Membership: The Council discussed membership, both for the Council, and the working groups. The Council is lacking UBAC members from both the UE and Teamsters. HR continues to reach out to these groups. Working group memberships were finalized for the coming year.

#### **4. Personal Experiences on the transition to the Via Marketplace for health care insurance**

Most reports were of success in signing up for Medicare Supplements and a drug coverage plan. Most experiences included some confusion and frustration, which occasionally needed the intervention of Caitlyn Sisler. Delays in processing transactions have started to be reported.

Caitlyn Sisler is actively trying to identify the approximately 40 retirees who have not yet signed up through Via for health insurance that will receive a UVM contribution.

#### **5. Progress of the faculty grievance process for retirees:**

Mara Saule provided a summary of the history that recently culminated in a grievance filed by retirees in response to the new retiree health care market place:

For the RFAO Executive Committee Meeting 1/21/26

Developments in the grievance access question within the Faculty Senate:

Since early Fall 2025, there have been increasing questions about grievance processes available to retirees, prompted in part by concerns regarding the transition to a new model for post-retirement health insurance benefits. During the past few months, Retired Faculty Senator Mara Saule and RFAO President Gurdon have had several conversations with Faculty Senate President McGowan, Senate staff, and Faculty Ombudsperson Keith Burt regarding past actions of the Senate and the potential for incorporating retired faculty explicitly in the Faculty Senate Bylaws and Constitution. A draft resolution for Senate consideration is forthcoming.

Currently, five University documents guide grievance procedures for current faculty and staff, none of which includes retirees:

- a. Faculty and staff union collective bargaining agreements (CBA) and contracts, which take precedence for processes affecting represented members and do not address retiree grievance processes.
- b. The "UVM Non-Union Employee Handbook" which applies to "full-time and regular part-time non-union employees."
- c. The Larner College of Medicine (LCOM) "Faculty Handbook" which explicitly excludes retired faculty from its grievance policy: "It does not apply to faculty who are retired, volunteer faculty, adjunct faculty or visiting faculty,"
- d. The "Faculty Senate Bylaws and Constitution" which, since March 2011, establishes an "Ad Hoc Grievance Committee for non-represented faculty" but does not explicitly include retired faculty.
- e. The "University and University Officers' Manual" (formerly called the "Officers' Handbook" and later simply the "University Manual") currently does not include any grievance processes, those having been superseded by union contract language for represented members, the Senate Bylaws and Constitution, and the Non-Union Employee Handbook. Originally, the "Officers' Handbook" included specific faculty grievance processes. In 2010, as a result of the advocacy of the RFAO Board and its then-president Jack McCormack, the Senate passed unanimously a resolution to revise the "Officers' Handbook" grievance procedure to include retirees. However, as the "Handbook" was revised not long afterward, all faculty process language was removed.

- f. It is important to note that in 2008, the State of Vermont Statutes specifically included University of Vermont retirees in the scope of practice for the Vermont Labor Relations Board, stating in part that “The Board shall hear and make a final determination on the grievances of all retired individual employees of the University of Vermont, groups of such retired individuals, and retired collective bargaining unit members of the University of Vermont.” Vermont Statutes, Title 3, Chapter 27, paragraph 926(i)
- g. The VLRB does not require that an employer have an internal grievance process. The language of the VLRB “Rules of Practice” (Section 18.1) states that “Grievances of persons not covered by a collective bargaining agreement, when permitted by law, are heard by the Board only after exhaustion of any administrative procedures that may be required by the employer. . .” In other words, the employer may or may not have an internal grievance process, but if there is one it must be exhausted by the grievant before going to the Board.

Following this report, there was a robust discussion among board members about the history of the grievance process for faculty and retirees. Several members of the board have had experience with the processes in the past. As noted above, the formal records of these processes have been lost from faculty handbooks more than once. It seemed important to reinstate a process for grievances to advance to the Vermont Labor Board.

Some members questioned whether having a formal process worked against a grievant, considering that there is not a strict requirement for an employer to have a such a process. That is, having a process that then must be exhausted may work against a grievant going to the VLB.

The RFAO board members unanimously approved a motion for Mara Saule to approach the Senate with wording to establish a model for a grievance process for retirees. It is hoped that this outcome for the retirees could become a model grievance process for staff, administrators and others (outside the RFAO).

6. We have been mindful of the wording in the RFAO constitution, that the purpose of the RFAO includes “enriching the lives of all members of the university community.” The board discussed ways to broaden the impact of the retiree organization to fulfill this purpose.

The new committee on Events and Speakers is organizing to address future activities of the board and organization. While we contemplate a broad array of potential activities and study other organizations as models, our first order of business is to make a robust list of potential speakers. This will allow us to plan and schedule events in a timely manner. We will endeavor to avoid concentration in one area of scholarship.

One pressing issue is the need to identify potential speakers for the 2026 summer and fall business meetings of the RFAO, and to make invitations in a timely manner. The existing list of nominated speakers was reviewed and a new name added.

7. The date of the next meeting will be moved to Feb. 11 to accommodate travel schedules.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 pm  
Respectfully submitted, Judith Van Houten