

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

May 20, 2026

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

Present: Takamura Ashikaga, Jay Ashman, Ralph Budd, Clare Burlingham, Gary Derr, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Judith Van Houten

Absent:

Call to Order: Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM

1. Approval of the Minutes of April 15, 2026

Minutes were approved.

2. Faculty Senate Report (Mara Saule)

The Faculty Senate met on Monday, April 27, in Memorial Lounge. Senate President Abigail McGowan's remarks highlighted UVM's marketing efforts in new student recruitment efforts, as well as the city of Burlington's new "planBTV 2050" initiative.

1. Two resolutions in Memoriam were read for Professor Edwin Owre, Emeritus Professor of Art, and Professor David Huddle, Emeritus Professor of English.
2. Jamie McGowan, Executive Director of International Partnerships and Programs, gave an extensive overview of services to UVM's approximately 430 international students from 75 countries and our approximately 330 international employees. She addressed the evolving immigration challenges that students and employees have been facing recently and outlined the various methods helping international students and employees navigate the immigration climate in all its aspects. Discussion noted that there is a shortage of immigration attorneys in Vermont, and Ms. McGowan noted that there are efforts to engage attorneys from neighboring states to help fill the gaps in Vermont counsel.
3. Kirk Dombrowski, VP for Research and Economic Development, gave an update on UVM's R1 status and grant activity. Overall, grant awards are only slightly down but there has been a shift in funding patterns. Overall, individual grants are seeing less funding; however, large collaborative and cross-college grants have had more success.
4. The resolution to amend the Attendance Policy was discussed. After lengthy discussion, with multiple concerns and questions arising, the motion to amend the policy was tabled until the October 2026 Senate meeting pending an ad hoc committee to address concerns and broader faculty input.

The Faculty Senate met on Thursday, May 14, in Memorial Lounge. The main goal of the meeting was to confer degrees in preparation for the May 16 Commencement ceremonies. In addition there were several significant agenda items.

1. Four resolutions in Memoriam were read for Professor Bud Etherton (CALS), Carol Miller (CAS), Jim Barbour (CESS), and Jean Harvey (CALS)

2. A resolution on AI Principles/Framework and Recommendations for Implementation of an AI module was discussed extensively. The Resolution serves two purposes: To provide an outline of guiding principles for the use of AI in the classroom, and to encourage (but not require) the use of an online orientation directed at students as a potential discussion prompt in classes, when desired by the faculty member. The Principles/Framework are not required but only offered to faculty and students as an optional tool for understanding AI while recognizing that AI is a rapidly evolving technology and thus the tool itself will need to be revised in an on-going fashion. After lengthy discussion, the Resolution passed.
3. Provost Linda Schadler gave an overview of the current enrollment situation for UVM, especially in the context of its competitors for students. In essence, while the University had anticipated the enrollment "cliff" now affecting especially New England institutions, we did not anticipate the effect of the confluence of increased student financial need and the loss of international students, in combination with the predicted decline in the potential student population. Loss of international students is particularly prevalent in the graduate school. This is complicated by the current uncertainties of grant funding, which is needed in many cases to hire graduate students, especially in the biomedical field.
4. Mara will be stepping down as RFAO rep on the Faculty Senate so a new appointment will be recruited.

3. Update on United Academics (Beth Mintz)

The procedural grievance by UA regarding health care was resolved with an understanding that UVM will give UA advanced notice of any changes to health care. The University cannot do anything that is considered to be "arbitrary or capricious". Previous use of the faculty senate ombudsman to file grievances appears to have been supplanted by the UA. But UA does not represent retirees. The state legislature permits UVM faculty, including retirees, to file grievances with the Vermont Labor Relations Board.

4. UBAC Activities (Ruth Farrell)

University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC) Update 5/20/26

Since the last RFAO Executive Board Meeting, UBAC met once, April 16th, and its Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) also met once, on May 7th.

UBAC Meeting April 16th:

The principal focus of this meeting was the proposed changes to the PPO1 health insurance plan for active employees as presented by HR. Caitlyn Sisler also gave an update on the annual premium increases going into effect as early as June 1 of this year for retiree Medicare supplement plans, noting that the HIWG would take up this topic at its next meeting.

HIWG Meeting May 7th

This meeting focused on retiree health insurance premium increases as follows:

Current situation: (Caitlyn Sisler)

- Many retirees, particularly those on United Health Care (UHC) plans have received notices of premium increases for the next 12 months, effective June 1 of this year, with increases much higher than expected. These are full-year annual increases. Humana has a November rate change date. The rate increases need to be approved by the state.
- There are many factors behind these increases: Vermont is a small state with an aging, smaller than average, population and high health care costs. It's a community-rated state (insurance

companies must charge the same) for age or gender. There were a lot of changes in the insurance market last year; most Medicare Advantage plans left the state.

- A marketplace has a wider risk pool than the approximately 2,400 enrollees that UVM would have had under a group plan. Even with the high increases, the open market is still likely more affordable than a group plan.
- Enrollees can voluntarily change insurance carriers for supplement plans at any time; they are not limited to a specific enrollment period. When voluntarily applying for coverage from a different carrier, one may have to go through underwriting (a medical risk assessment). This could lead to higher premiums or even denial of coverage from the new carrier depending on the results. But there are no negative consequences for applying for a Medigap plan and being denied or deciding not to enroll because of higher premiums. Your current coverage remains until you decide to cancel it. So no downside to inquiring. This was felt to be where VIA should be helping. Also the State Department of Financial Regulation would know about rate changes since insurance companies must file with this department and be approved for any rate increases.
- HRA receipts submitted for reimbursement (5,000 claims submitted so far this year) appear to confirm that \$308 for the base premium was a good estimate for providing adequate buying power for a retiree's supplemental medical plan and a prescription drug plan in Vermont before the new annual increases were announced. A mid-year increase of UVM reimbursements is being considered. There was discussion whether returning to a group plan would be better and not divide the retiree group. However, many insurance companies are eliminating group plans, and the few remaining ones are quite expensive. A brief historical look by a couple RFAO members at premiums under previous group plans suggests most are paying less currently, although this could change in the near future.
- Two new insurance companies (Mutual of Omaha and Cigna) are joining the exchange in Vermont. Uncertain whether one would be subjected to underwriting for previous medical conditions.

Goal:

Caitlyn Sisler stated that the goal for setting the base premium is that it adequately allows someone who gets 100% cost subsidy to buy a supplemental plan G or N or something in between, and a prescription drug plan. There was general agreement in the group that this was the correct goal.

Next Steps:

HR is working on projecting costs and determining what increase would be needed for the HRA to have similar buying power for calendar 2027 overall, and for the remainder of 2026, so that the UBAC/HIWG can make recommendations for proposed HRA increases going forward.

Other business:

The meeting concluded with a final discussion of the proposed changes to PPO1 for current employees.

5. Status of the Spring Luncheon (Judy Van Houten and Rachel Johnson)

Have 67 retirees attending. Wolfgang as a speaker has drawn considerable attention.

6. Guest -- Alicia Estey, VP for Finance, Administration and Human Resources

Alicia acknowledged that UVM is currently in a "tricky" spot financially. Enrollment is the biggest challenge, due to cliff of demographic changes and reduced foreign students. Applicants are getting into their first and second choices more often. Perception is that students were offered more financial aid at other institutions. Complicating this are the several recent years when there was no tuition increase.

UVM housing rentals are higher than current market levels and is only 50% occupied.

Alicia noted that she cannot be certain that there will not be layoffs. UVM has a projected \$12m deficit and the need is to take this from base costs.

The recreation facility construction is to be paid by private funding. There was discussion that it felt there was a bit of a disconnect to have President Trompe asking the state for partial funding for the project. There was a feeling that it would be better to fund this completely privately.

Alicia noted that UVM's health care plan is quite "rich" but also costly. They are working to open up additional available health care plans to faculty/staff, beyond the current single PP01 plan. Point was made that UVM should maintain a progressive plan, in which those with lower salaries get higher benefits. A suggestion was made to consider a health care investment fund (similar to a Roth IRA) where faculty could contribute during our active years.

Alicia is aware of the mid-year increase from UHC.

New CHRO begins next Tuesday with slight re-alignment.

Research grants are down about 3% so not as bad as anticipated. Still getting full indirect costs from NIH grants, and not 15%, which is still under litigation.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Ralph Budd