EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

September 16, 2026
In Person Meeting with Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

Present: Takamura Ashikaga, Jay Ashman, Ralph Budd**,** Claire Burlingham, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Rachel Johnson, Jane Kolodinsky, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Judith Van Houten

Absent: Michael Gurdon, Gary Derr

Call to Order: Beth Mintz called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM

1. **Approval of the Minutes of August 19, 2026**

Minutes were approved.

2. **Health Care Grievance update (Ron Frey, Tim O'Brien)**

Ron Frey (UVM Personnel Director for 23 years) gave some history. UVM was not unionized years ago. UVM VP at the time advised that health care benefits were at risk. This initiated discussions of alternatives.

VLRB said UVM faculty was not covered, so they decided to go to the Vermont legislature to present the fact that UVM salaries were historically ow at UVM and faculty thus depended on benefits. A grievance process was developed and sent to UVM attorney. This became official in 2010/2011 (as published in Hermes newsletter for retired faculty).

Voluntary separation agreement of 2000 came with UVM guarantee of complete health care coverage. In addition, new faculty then were offered full health care that would continue into retirement.

With current health care concerns, Ron went to VLRB. The Committee gave Ron authority to speak to the legislature. The new individual health care plans was viewed as a considerable change from previous health care plans for retirees. As this grievance has proceeded (filed 9 months ago), UVM has been viewed as making attempts to block this on at least three occasions (e.g. requesting list of retirees was denied). Offers to sit down with UVM administration has been turned down. VLRB has agreed to hear the case, but UVM attorneys have filed with the Vermont Supreme Court an interrogatory appeal to block this. UVM attorneys say the group cannot represent retirees without their names, and UVM declines to provide this list. Hence, each retiree must represent themselves.

Ron and Tim requested RFAO help in getting retiree list.

Alison suggested speaking with grievance officer of the faculty union (Ingrid Nelson).

It was noted that UVM could not get a group plan from any vender.

Ron feels it would be too expensive to hire a lawyer and take the time to bring them up to speed.

Handbook contains language noting that UVM can change policies with "employees" (i.e. not retirees). It contains language regarding reducing benefits if UVM were in financial exigency.

Tim has asked several times to meet with the University officials but has been declined thus far.

It was asked, "What would a remedy look like?": Ultimately to give retirees a choice of returning to a group plan as with active faculty (charges going to Medicare first).

UVM is self-insured for active employees. Current cost of family of 4 is $49,999. So UVM contribution to retirees is miniscule in comparison, and also, guarantees to retirees will diminish as they pass. Current faculty hired since 2012 do not have retiree health benefits.

Ask of RFAO: 1. List of non-represented (currently and never) retirees. 2. RFAO designates Ron and Tim as our negotiators of health care for retirees. 3. Get RFAO to request president and HR to talk with Ron and Tim.

Claire suggests filing a freedom of information request for the list.

Judy stressed need for getting critical information out to retirees, so they are aware of when rate increases may occur and when open enrollment begins. Rate increases must be posted by Nov. 1.

Beth summarized that the main concern is that risk is being transferred from UVM to individuals against future increases of cost.

3. Faculty Senate update (Jane Kolodinsky)

Abby McGowan introduced herself as the new president of the Senate and Amy Trubek is the vice president/president elect.

There is an online discussion module for students on how to deal with AI.

The search for the new Provost is NOT public. UVM has invited 150 people to participate in the process over the next few weeks.

A goal of the Senate for 2027-27 is to continue streamlining processes, including a determination of when the full Senate needs to vote.

All UVM public material (including all student resources and online courses/course material) must align with the new Federal Digital Accessibility rules by April 2027. This is a big lift for UVM overall and a lighter lift for faculty who have been using Brightspace checkers for accessibility, UVM is not even ½ way there yet. Sharon Mone is the contact.

A "high level" report about the UVM budget was provided by CFO Alicia Estey. While this was clearly laid out, no actual numbers were shared:

Currently borrowing for higher ed (bonds) is risky and interest rates are higher
We are 15% down in student enrollments, our major source of revenue
The federal grant situation remains uncertain
Deferred maintenance continues to be an issue
Health care costs continue to rise

Units across the board, including cost and revenue centers took a 3.25% reduction.

There were questions about IBB and to which units the accessibility rules applied (yes, Extension is included).

4. **United Academics update (Beth Mintz)**

Bargaining for the next contract begins in the Spring of 2028 and UA is beginning to recruit bargaining team members.

The administration has reached out to all campus unions (UA, the faculty union; Staff United, the staff union; United Electrical Workers, representing the physical plant; and the Teamsters, which represents police services) about expanding health plan options to include several high deductible plans available to non-represented employees.

5. **UBAC update (Ruth Farrell)**

There's nothing new to report on the UBAC front; the first meeting of the year has been scheduled for Sept. 17.

Reimbursement rate is still being discussed for 2027. Hope is prior to Oct. 1.

6. **Retired Scholars Award Program**

Previous Retiree scholars were approached about making a brief 5-minute video. Reaction was mixed. It was suggested that we contact the person in Communications who handles videos to determine what would be involved and cost to produce a short good quality video.

RFA for new scholars has gone out.

7. **RFAO Annual Meeting update (Judy Van Houten)**

The meeting will be held in Waterman Memorial Lounge on Thursday November 5 at 2:00-4:00 PM. President Tromp has agreed to be the speaker on Victorian Literature. Dwight will arrange a Zoom link.

URL link to “Women of UVM” at RFAO site needs updating as AI mistakenly links contacts to Judy and Rachel.

8. **Other business**

The new CEO of the UVM Foundation, Chris Jacobson, would like to meet with us on Nov. 18. Maura will invite him.

The next Board meeting will be on October 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Ralph Budd

Addendum to RFAO Minutes of September 16, 2026

Ron Frey and Tim O'Brien's clarifying comments regarding grievance process

Historical background. At a meeting in 2009 UVM VP Gower advised that health care benefits for retirees were at risk. UVM was not unionized years ago and UVM had no grievance process. This initiated a review of retirees' options should they believe UVM is violating retirement agreements. We thought we could go to the VLRB with grievances, but VLRB said UVM retired faculty were not covered by Vermont labor Relations Law. So, the RFAO Committee gave Ron authority to speak to the legislature. He decided to go to the Vermont legislature and was able to get legislation passed that allowed non-represented retirees to bring grievances to the VLRB. At the same time, because there was no internal grievance for retirees, Ron worked with RFAO to develop a grievance process for retirees. A grievance process was developed and sent to UVM attorney. This became official in 2010/2011 (as published in Hermes newsletter for retired faculty).

Voluntary separation agreement of 2000 came with UVM guarantee of health care coverage as for that provided to active employees. In addition, new faculty, as a condition of employment, were offered full health care, comparable to active employees, that would continue into retirement. Retirement ends at time of death.

Current status. With current health care concerns, Ron and Tim attempted to file a grievance with UVM, which UVM rejected and denied that there was a grievance process for retirees. They then filed a grievance with VLRB. The new individual health care plans were viewed as a considerable change from previous health care plans for retirees and a violation of the promise that UVM would pay 100% of the premium. As this grievance has proceeded (filed 9 months ago), UVM has been viewed as making attempts to block this on at least three occasions (e.g. requesting list of retirees was denied). Offers to sit down with UVM administration have been turned down. VLRB has agreed to hear the case, but UVM attorneys have filed with the Vermont Supreme Court an interrogatory appeal to block this. UVM attorneys say the group cannot represent retirees without their names, and UVM declines to provide this list. Hence, each retiree must represent themselves.

Ask of RFAO:
1. List of non-represented current retirees and surviving spouses.
2. RFAO designates Ron and Tim as RFAO's representative in the grievance for retiree medical insurance.
3. Get RFAO to request president and HR to talk with Ron and Tim.
4. Include in the requests the authority and purpose of the RFAO