

RFAO President's Report to the RFAO Membership

September 1, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

In lieu of our Annual General Meeting, which will not happen this month, I wanted to compile, for those of you who are interested, a brief report on the activities of your Board over the past twelve months. As you may be aware, the RFAO Executive Board normally meets monthly throughout the academic year. However, as is the case with every other aspect of university and societal life, our own good intentions have been upended and required adjustment in 2020.

One important thing that we do is to maintain a close relationship with important players in the current UVM administration. For example, the then-new President, Suresh Garimella, was our guest at the January meeting. This provided the first opportunity to introduce all Board members and highlight our mission on behalf of retirees as well as to hear about his strategic goals and aspirations. We had subsequently planned to meet with Provost Patty Prelock at the March meeting and senior Human Resources staff in April. Unfortunately, this schedule was interrupted by Governor Scott's state of emergency declaration in response to the pandemic. This has precluded in-person meetings on campus and that situation will remain the case through the Fall semester and likely beyond. The Board is gradually becoming accustomed to video conferencing among ourselves. We intend to reschedule our contacts with the Provost and Human Resources for later in the year, though now utilizing this remote technology.

Also impacted by the virus were the Spring luncheon and the President's annual lunch held every August to honor the UVM retired community. The former we were able to cancel before too much effort had been invested in facility and speaker arrangements. The Board took the initiative to communicate with President Garimella, recommending that the late Summer luncheon not be held given the associated cost and considering the financial pressures confronting the university with the disruption of instruction and budget cuts being felt by faculty and staff. Needless to say, that luncheon would have had to be cancelled anyway because of the extended restrictions. It is obviously our hope that these public events will be revived in 2021.

Having highlighted these unanticipated difficulties, I don't want to present a total picture of woe. Your Board can certainly point to a number of achievements.

1. In addition to the continuing voice which we have on the Faculty Senate (and in that regards I would like to welcome our new representative on that body, Mara Saule) the RFAO has been invited to have a representative (non-voting) on the United Academics Executive Committee. Board member Beth Mintz has been attending these meetings since January. We are especially pleased to have this seat at the table since the UA contract is influential in determining the health care coverage of certain retired faculty as well as those soon to retire. To be able to speak to these and other issues of mutual benefit in real time is immensely valuable in protecting what has already been gained by our members.

2. I am delighted to bring your attention to some real progress in modernizing our website. It is fair to say that we have suffered from lack of ease in access to our pre-existing website. Indeed, you may have experienced different links that would lead to two different website profiles and contents. In brief this was because one was established independently (heroically by former Board member Lou Izzo) but a subsequent transfer of staff support coming from the Provost's Office then produced a different portal for access which proved difficult to navigate through the Provost's website. We have been fortunate to have Dwight Matthews join the Board to take on the role of "chief information officer" and he has rendered his talents to produce a streamlined new website that you are currently viewing. I should emphasize that we are gradually adding material to it. Work is underway on completing a history of the organization as well as bringing up-to-date a In Memoriam folder. We hope to finish these projects in the coming months.

3. One other exciting innovation is the creation of a listserv that is purely for member intercommunication. Our original UVM-RFAO listserv (being utilized for this memo) has always been intended to be unidirectional. In other words, it is designed to keep the retired community informed about important information being disseminated by the Administration (President's Office, Provost's Office, etc.) and occasional news relayed to you by the Board. While this function will always remain an important one, the feeling has been emerging that there is room for a parallel channel of communication that is bidirectional. Consequently, there is now a second listserv to which I want to draw your attention and to which you will be able to subscribe (RFAO-FORUM@list.uvm.edu). I wish to make clear that you need to opt in if you want to post messages or see messages from other colleagues within this particular forum. If you have no such interest, you do not need to do anything. In either case, everyone will continue to receive official communications via the UVM-RFAO listserv. You will receive a follow up email from Dwight Matthews (dmatthew@uvm.edu) explaining how to subscribe to the new RFAO-FORUM listserv.

That concludes my report. All the best over the coming months.

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