

RFAO President's Report to the RFAO Membership

Presented at the RFAO Annual General Meeting, November 2, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

During the past year your Board met on ten occasions for scheduled meetings. There was also an additional special meeting held to deal with member experiences with the new Cigna health insurance plan.

Indeed, the bulk of our time and energy was taken up in channeling the concerns being raised by a significant number of members following the transition on January 1st from Vermont Blue Advantage to the Cigna Medicare Advantage program. In total we met with the university's employee benefits director five times and on four of those occasions together with Cigna company representatives. While the frequency of retiree contacts with members of the Board and with the Human Resources department have decreased, perhaps as a result of fine-tuning of service delivery or greater retiree familiarity with the plan, there are still ongoing issues impacting a few colleagues and so we will remain vigilant.

In a not unrelated matter, at the close of 2022 the Board brought to the attention of United Academics that the University Benefits Advisory Council had ceased to function in practice, despite being written into the faculty union's contract with the administration. UBAC had been established in 2007 as a body that was advisory to the president and was intended to incorporate the perspectives of faculty and staff in benefits-related matters. That this collaborative body was in limbo was a key reason why retirees had not received any meaningful advance notice of the change in insurance providers. UBAC has since been reconstituted. The Board argued for representation given that decisions over benefits can directly impact retirees. We were invited to nominate two representatives. Ruth Farrell and Mara Saule currently fill those roles.

A second prime issue that we have worked on, actually over several years, has been access to software. This has been of real importance to those who continue to engage in research and published scholarship but suddenly lost access to the university license to use their preferred software packages following retirement. The Board engaged with the new Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, in face-to-face meetings and exchanges of draft proposals, and we ultimately arrived at a satisfactory resolution of this long-standing irritant. A new classification of "active retired faculty" status has been created and a simple protocol now exists for emeriti to apply to their former department's chair for the granting of this designation.

Finally, we continue to receive a small but valued budget to support continuing meritorious research conducted by some of our colleagues. At the end of 2022 three Retired Scholars Awards were granted to emeriti representing the English, History, and Plant & Soil Science departments.

Respectfully submitted,
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