

RFAO Executive Board meeting

April 20, 2022

MINUTES:

Present: Michael Gurdon, Dwight Matthews, Judith Van Houten, Ruth Farrell, Mara Saule, Alison Pechenick, Steven Cutler, Lee Thompson, Alan Gotlieb, Taka Ashikaga, Rachel Johnson

Not present: Beth Mintz, Richard Branda, Jack McCormack

Visitors from VBA: Pamela Getsie, Rich Lewis, Elena Bertrand, Jessica Nelson, Prerakukumar Parikh, Kathleen Clark; Thomas Petrov Chief Medical Officer could not attend

Visitor from UVM HR: Greg Paradiso

1. Visitor Pamela Getsie, President of VBA, began with presentations about VBA. Richard Lewis, Community Outreach Manager, talked about events such as a webinar on Ageism that is still available, Vermont senior games, 50+ Expo, Alzheimer's Assoc Walks and dinner. His goal is to inform participants about VBA

Pamela Getsie talked about the Member service call process. The call abandon rate very low, and 90.3% calls are answered in 30 seconds.

Michael Gurdon summarized the key irritation among VBA members, which is the difficulty in getting correct information from reps, who are largely in Michigan. They cannot distinguish our plan from others they support. This problem is compounded by misinformation in mailings. Two examples were the mailing card offering hearing services and OTC from NationsHearing. VBA subsequently sent out a correction and apology to clarify that this service is not covered by VBA.

Another mailing originating from Berlin, VT, described coverage of a hearing allowance and OTC materials not applicable to VBA members. Subsequently it was discovered through Michael's work with HR, while investigating a complaint from a member, that VBA members should have had hearing discounts through TruHearing.

In short, the continuing miscommunications lead to the questions: What is the UVM customized plan? How do I get accurate information on coverage?

Pam Getsie clarified that the incorrect mailings come from staff's misunderstanding of the audiences and lack of proper member list filtering. This is being corrected through training. In the meanwhile a new resource guide has just been mailed to provide a "source of truth." Unfortunately there are several errors in this booklet, which the board members pointed out.

In further clarification, we were told that the company TruHearing, which is separate from VBA, offers discounts to individuals who are not covered for hearing services through insurance. They offer a manufacturer discount that is not VBA specific.

Pamela Getsie and others listen in to calls from VBA members to maintain standards. They ask that if there are problems, please send the information to Pamela Getsie or Michael Gurdon.

Jessica Nelson discussed "escalations" resulting from the calls. These are cases that are sent to higher level VBA staff for resolution. Year to date, there have been only 24 escalations. Greg Paradiso, clarified

that some escalated calls originate from HR. Members call VBA first, and, if not satisfied, call HR, which then “escalates” the call. In response to a board member’s question, we were told that in 2021 there were 4500 calls to the call center and a very small % were escalated. We were told that the number would be provided to us.

One member discussed the cumbersome process for appeal, grievance and reimbursement after a call to the call center. An advocate would be extremely helpful to the members after escalation. Jessica agreed that the grievance process cumbersome, but is required by Med Advantage programs in general. There are CMS time standards for these processes. The board members pressed for a less cumbersome process for VBA members, many of whom are sick and cannot advocate for themselves.

The discussion moved to vaccines and the issues surrounding some vaccines such as Shingrex and tetanus which are not free of cost and are very expensive. The flyers to VBA members have information that does not apply to them, including about vaccines. The mailings, such as about rewards and incentives, are not specific and are unclear. A recommendation was made by VBA staff in this meeting to receive the immunizations through your pharmacy rather than your PCP or health center because they will not charge for the vaccinations.

We asked regarding Shingles and others vaccines whether there is a web site to answer the questions directly. Pam Getsie recommends simply calling call center and to use it as Self-serve. A board member requested a copy of the providers’ handbook. However, two complications for members trying to work through details on their own are that to use the providers’ data base you need codes, and, second, we would not be privy to other details, such as that co-pays that were not applied during the pandemic are now back in force for singles vaccine and others.

Pam Getsie – It is a Medicare requirement that services must be delivered by a provider that participates with Medicare. Under the old plan, Medicare would decline and then BCBS over-ride would cover the expense. Medicare Advantage does not have the flexibility to cover this “out of pocket.” Some supplemental benefits can be added on, e.g. vision, but does not have to be provided by Medicare approved provider.

Greg Paradiso described difference between new advantage plans on the market and VBA. For average plans on the market, there are deductibles, out of pocket costs, and co-insurance that VBA does not have. Our plan is more expensive, but our plan provides more, including drugs at the \$400 price point.

Pam Getsie stated that VBA will make a comparison chart for us on what services we get vs what we used to get, and the costs.

Other issues included: VBA use of DHL slows the process. Previous BCBS J plan covered naturopathic services but no longer does under VBA. There remain questions about how much is charged to UVM. Under the vision plan, one refraction is provided by VBA, and one is provided by the program that can be purchased separately. This should be made clear to the members.

Action Item: The members asked Michael Gurdon to make clear to the VBA members about the vision and hearing services available to them and also, very importantly, to encourage them to receive some of their vaccines through pharmacies rather than health centers and physicians’ offices, where the co-pay will be large for vaccines such as tetanus and shingles, and perhaps others.

2. Bruce Leavitt letter. Rachel, Mara and Michael met to discuss the response to the letter from Bruce Leavitt to Suresh Garimella requesting support for software to assist his efforts on behalf of the COM reunions and fundraising. The response that was received last week was from CIO Simeon Ananou, which was not unexpected, but the apparent lack of understanding of Dr. Leavitt's situation was very discouraging. It was disheartening that all he received was a rehash of the information about restricting access to active affiliates, who are current students, faculty and staff. Once again, the response is all about HR system and of no real assistance at all, even in this very specific situation.

Now we will bring this situation to the attention of the UVM Foundation. Mara has an e-mail from Jim Keller, Interim Foundation CEO, and Alli Lambert, Foundation staff member, who would be happy to meet with RFAO Board. Michael will invite them to the May 18 board meeting.

Beth Mintz has started the process to gain affiliate status. Her Department Chair has approved, but it has stalled at the level of the Dean's Office.

3. Minutes of March 16 were approved with no amendments.

4. Mara Saule provided the Faculty Senate Report: The move of Physics to CEMS was approved. Thomas Chittenden will prepare an update on the efforts to change the composition of the Boards of Trustees to include faculty. CIO Simeon Anonou reported that Bright Space System will replace Blackboard, which did not submit a bid for continuation of this service.

The full report is attached.

5. Alison Pechenick reported on the UA activities: AFT Higher Ed and AAUP are merging, which is a constructive reorganization and also represents a savings in annual dues. UVM is updating its policy on campus speakers. The desired bill to add faculty and staff to BOT of UVM and VSC did not make it out of committee, and was not successfully attached as rider to budget. Vermont Senate Ed committee is working to include language in a separate, higher-ed related bill, to seat one faculty member on each BOT. Bargaining is on-going for part time faculty and staff. Nursing faculty were denied a recruitment-critical raise, incorrectly informed by administration that unit-specific raises are "disallowed by the CBA"; UA is continuing to work on this. AFL-CIO has already endorsed a candidate for Congress; UA will not follow suit, and plans to host a primary debate later this season. Perceiving inconsistencies and inequities, efforts are underway to standardize course equivalents, compensation and annual evaluation across campus.

6. TIAA: A board member warned us that they found on their 1099 from TIAA that the RMD failed to take out funds for Vermont taxes. Most of the staff at the TIAA Williston office seem to have left. Some members have done well on the web site with help of North Carolina call center for RMD.

7. Debrief of VBA meeting. There have been improvements in the call center accuracy and ability to identify our specific VBA plan. However, the board members found the VBA staff to be defensive and unable to provide the quality control over the printed information mailed to members. There is a lack of trust that the information provided in mailings and call center is correct.

Adjourned at 4:01 pm

submitted, Judith Van Houten

RFAO Faculty Senate Report

Faculty Senate Meeting 3/28/22

In his opening remarks, President Tom Borchert announced that the Senate will continue to meet remotely via Teams for the duration of the semester. He also encouraged senators to communicate with their departments about Senate meeting discussions and actions. Tom will also provide a summary of the February meeting breakout group discussions of the Art and Science Group consultants' report on prospective student expectations.

The consent agenda included a new minor in Medical Diagnostics (CNHS), as well as a no-contest deactivation of the BS in Early Childhood Special Education. The latter topic generated some discussion but it was clarified that CESS has restructured the program and that a new Special Education degree will come to the Senate in the fall. Thus, the motion carried.

Resolutions in Memoriam were read for Dean Charles Corrigan, Professor and Dean Emeritus of CESS, and for William E. Mitchell, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology in CAS.

Regarding future Senate leadership, Tom Borchert stood unopposed for re-election and will continue to serve as President for a second term (ending June 30, 2025). Cathy Paris also stood unopposed for at-large member of the Senate Executive Committee and will serve until June 30, 2024. A call for nominations to fill a second at-large position will be distributed.

A lengthy discussion of the proposed move of the Physics Department from CAS to CEMS resulted in the motion being carried with 52 votes to approve, 3 opposed, 4 abstentions. The report of the Faculty Senate ad hoc review committee endorsed the proposal. Richard Cate, and Dean Schadler and Dean Falls addressed concerns surrounding funding, space, and the filling of faculty lines.

Tom Borchert updated the Senate on the Vermont legislative bill concerning the composition of the Board of Trustees, which did not get moved out of committee this session. Thomas Chittenden, former Faculty Senate President and current member of the VT Senate and its Education Committee, will attend the May Senate meeting to provide an update on the status of the bill.

J. Dickinson, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Student Success, presented an overview of the previous and new model for structuring the UVM Learning Communities.