

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

January 17, 2024

Hybrid meeting with Video Conference on Microsoft Teams and in person in Medical Education Building, Room 309

### MINUTES

**Present:** Taka Ashikaga, Ralph Budd, Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

**Absent:** none

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:02pm. He noted that the last in-person meeting of the Board was 4 years ago.

1. Minutes of November 15, 2023, approved.
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Faculty Senate Reports (Maura Saule)
    - i. Faculty Senate meeting of 11/17/2023 (held via Teams)
      1. Faculty Senate president Tom Borchart started the meeting with a few announcements, including mention of the delay of a Senate report evaluating the libraries' proposed reorganization plan due to lack of consultation with affected academic units as well as with Libraries' faculty and staff. Also, Pres. Borchart mentioned that the UVM portal, MyUVM, is scheduled to be upgraded in the Spring semester.
      2. Most importantly, President Borchart addressed the very recent shooting of three young men near the campus and he decried--at length and with passion--any hate, violence, or racism and discrimination in our community.
      3. A lengthy discussion of academic freedom and outside speakers followed, prompted by the rescheduling of the Will Miller Social Justice Lecture Series speaker after October 7th's attack on Israel and bombings on Gaza. Trent Klingerman, Vice President and General Counsel, addressed concerns surrounding the timeline of the rescheduling and change of venue to virtual lecture. A detailed summary of this presentation can be found on the Faculty Senate website and its meeting minutes. Concerns largely centered on academic freedom, communication, and consultation.
      4. A report of the Research, Scholarship, and Creative Arts Committee's review of a Water Resources Institute proposal summarized the proposal and its benefits to research as well as the curriculum. The proposal will be voted on at the December 18th Senate meeting.
      5. Jay Jacobs, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, presented an overview of how UVM has responded to the Supreme Court decision on Affirmative Action. In short, while race can no longer be considered, in and of itself, as a factor in admissions, race can be considered via mention in application essays.
    - ii. Faculty Senate meeting of December 18, 2023 (held remotely via Teams)
      1. In his remarks, President Borchert provided an update on discussions regarding the decision to hold the 2023 Will Miller Social Justice lecture. The administration with the Senate will conduct a further review of decision and report back to the Senate.
      2. A resolution in memoriam for Jeremiah Dickerson, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, was read.
      3. The resolution to establish the Water Resources Institute at UVM was voted on and passed.

4. An overview of the new "UVM Go" program was presented by Assoc. Provost Dickinson. UVM Go is a program that engages students in short-term international and community service endeavors.
5. A presentation of the new MyUVM portal transition was presented by Registrar Veronika Carter, labelled the "Experience" project. Slides are available on the Faculty Senate website. Implementation of "Experience" will occur in fall 2024, with training, testing, and transition during spring and summer.
6. In his annual financial update to the Senate, Richard Cate addressed three specific issues as requested by President Borchert: current tuition strategy; employee and retiree health insurance; and student housing expansion plans.

Re: Tuition strategy. After holding tuition flat for several years, inflationary effects have demanded that this year the administration increase tuition for out of state students by 3.5% while holding in state tuition flat. In addition, in state and out of state students in 3 colleges (Nursing and Health Sciences, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, and Grossman School of Business) are now assessed an additional \$1000.00 student fee prompted by accreditation requirements for small class sizes for labs and practica, as well as national norms for highly competitive faculty salaries.

Re: Housing. Three projects are in various stages of planning and building. At the South Burlington Market Street (off Dorset Street) location a complex housing 290 students will open for the fall 2024. Also currently under construction is an adjacent housing facility with 35 units intended for faculty and staff. An additional housing facility in the same location is planned for fall 2025 opening, with 620 beds. A third housing facility for 545 undergraduate students is planned for construction in the current DoubleTree Hotel far parking lot, to open summer 2026. Finally, zoning permits are currently being pursued with both Burlington and South Burlington for student housing facilities in the fields at the corner of East Avenue and Williston Road.

Re: Health insurance. VP Cate gave an overview of current employee insurance via Blue Cross/Blue Shield, that has now affiliated with a Michigan organization for administrative support--although the plan itself is not affected by this affiliation. Regarding the CIGNA Advantage plan for retirees, VP Cate observed that UVM engaged the plan for financial reasons, specifically that it saved UVM \$7M/year through CIGNA's very competitive bid. While he said that there have been "bumps" in the implementation, overall UVM is making good progress with CIGNA in resolving most issues although there are still some issues left to address. When asked by a faculty member whether UVM is reconsidering CIGNA for retirees, he said there is no plan for reconsideration of the contract with CIGNA. Another faculty member asked how faculty provide the administration input about CIGNA issues. VP Cate said it is both through the "retiree association" and through emails to HR.

- b. United Academics Update (Beth and Alison). There is U/A concern about the enrollment and housing plans of the University for an additional 1000 beds and 1500 more graduate students. U/A encouraged the Faculty Senate to fill its committee for academic freedom. U/A has been asked to administer a proposed faculty bequest, because such donations made to UVM incur a 5% fee. A debate was initiated regarding Israel because some Jewish faculty feel unsafe. After discussion U/A did not take a position as a unit on the call for a cease fire but felt it best to leave this as an individual decision. The Bargaining Unit has developed a platform but it has not been disclosed yet. U/A continues to work in Montpelier to add faculty representation on the UVM Board of Trustees. There is a concern by U/A about whether the review process for the University President is being followed.
- c. UBAC Report (Ruth) University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC) update 1-17-2024

- i. The UBAC met on December 21, 2023.
  - ii. Membership: Andrey Ukhov, professor of finance from the Grossman School, attended the December 21 meeting as a new UA representative to the Council. UBAC still lacks required representation from United Electrical Workers, Teamsters, and UVM Staff United, and recommended representation from the Staff Council and the Faculty Senate. Caitlyn Sisler is working on getting this representation in place.
  - iii. Working Groups: The Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) is a UBAC standing committee yet to be established. The Council discussed the importance of establishing the standing committee. In addition, the Council expressed interest in forming additional working groups on childcare benefits, retiree benefits, and employ wellness. There was also interest in forming a working group with expertise in conducting focus groups and surveys to gather information from the council's various constituents. Following the meeting, the Chair sent out an MS form seeking individual member interest in specific working groups and preferred meeting times for Spring semester.
  - iv. Council/Administration Communications: Some Council members noted that with the cancelling of our November meeting and other intervening factors, there was little time for the Council to provide input on the 15% increase in premiums for health care coverage, and in the decision about how to address the new Vermont law disallowing incentives for mail-order prescriptions. On the former, the 15% premium increase for health care coverage was a straight pass-through from BCBS. On the latter, 2.5% of UVM employees benefit from a \$100 cost saving on prescription deductibles by using mail-order providers. UVM proposed eliminating this benefit for the 2.5% of employees that utilize it to bring the University in compliance with this new law.
  - v. The administration will provide a benefits milestone/decision schedule for the next eighteen months to facilitate timely input.
  - vi. Next Meeting: The Council will meet in person on January 18th.
- d. Chris Lehman, the University's new Chief Human Resources Officer, was introduced to the Board, and Board members introduced themselves to him. Chair Gurdon stated that over 600 faculty and administrative officers are members of the RFAO. Mr. Lehman said that although he is new to education, he has multiple family and acquaintance ties to academics. Previously he served as CHRO at OTC Industrial Technology, a \$1 billion engineered equipment distribution and service company and he has had HR leadership roles at various diversified international manufacturing and distribution firms. He feels that he brings experience from private equity and can apply business principles to education. He recognizes that bringing an approach different from other HR directors may be seen by some as a radical change. His guiding principles are to build trust, have conversations, and treat people better than the contract. There has been some turnover of personnel in HR, with some people leaving and others retiring. For the most part vacancies were filled internally, with two new positions to be filled. Of particular interest to the Board is a plan to hire a retiree engagement coordinator who will look to improve relationships with retirees and strengthen ties with UVM. This person will seek to improve communication between retirees and UVM and enhance coordination between HR, Cigna and retirees. Following his introductory comments there were some questions from Board members. One concern has been the difficulty in finding physical therapy providers in our area who will accept Cigna. He said that he would look into the situation particularly as it relates to Birchwood Manor. He was asked about reports that Cigna was negotiating to sell its Medicare advantage program to another insurance company. He said that he has no new information but his hope is that if sold, it will be to a stronger company with a larger provider network. Currently there are issues with Cigna's limited network and its administration of coverage. Converting to a new company plan with an even smaller network would be a major hardship for retirees who live in other parts of the country. He was asked if HR would consider offering new retirees a choice between Medicare with medigap or a Medicare advantage program. He thought this idea was worth further consideration.

- e. Review, and possibly approve, the draft survey of our membership (Ralph and Dwight). Ralph and Dwight presented a Draft Survey of UVM-related activities by retired faculty members. They are hoping for a 25% response rate and perhaps submitting it to members at 5 year intervals. There was discussion of what period of the retirement should be emphasized (early, recent or all years). The Board recommended proceeding with its distribution to members. Ralph will prepare a cover e-mail and Dwight will distribute it.
- f. Other business.
  - i. There has been no response yet from President Garimella to the letter from Chair Gurdon regarding health insurance coverage gaps for some members, but Chair Gurdon discussed the letter with Chris Lehman.
  - ii. Chair Gurdon will not be available for the February meeting and will ask Vice Chair Mintz to lead the meeting. Secretary Branda also will be away and Ralph Budd will keep the minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:58pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: February 21, 2024, at 2pm.

**Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda**