

Minutes RFAO Executive Board Meeting

February 21, 2024

Hybrid meeting at LCOM MedEd203

Present: 7 members present in person (Ralph Budd, Takamaru Ashikaga, Judith Van Houten, Ruth Farrell, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson, Dwight Matthews) and two by Zoom (Alison Pechenick and Alan Gotlieb).

Absent: Michael Gurdon, Richard Branda, Beth Mintz

Call to order: Judy Van Houten presided, in the absence of President Michael Gurdon. Meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM with

Approval of minutes of the January 17, 2024 meeting of the Board. Accepted

Discussion of the visit from Chris Lehman, Chief of HR. Just received word that Liv Townsend of HR has been appointed as Retiree and Engagement Coordinator. She has previously worked in HR since May, 2023, first as Onboarding Specialist (4 months) and then as Benefits Processing Specialist (6 months). The group felt Liv should be invited to a future meeting. Feeling about Chris Lehman's visit was that he spoke at a high level in broad brushstrokes, but that it was time to discuss more the details of our health plan. Still have not heard on the letter Michael Gurdon sent to President Garimella.

Concern was expressed about what the future will be of our Cigna coverage, given the sale of their Medicare Advantage division. The sale is pending approval. Due to start in early 2025. This should be a key point in discussions with UA. Concern was raised about coverage for those who cannot use Cigna. They should be offered an equivalent plan that works for them ("No retiree left behind"). We are now in 2nd year of three-year contract. Alison will express these views to UA and particularly to emphasize that UVM owns this responsibility. Need also to raise issue of lack of timeliness of communications and transparency of HR with RFAO (and not via UA but directly with RFAO). This concern dominates over other issues of software access, parking, and library use. It was pointed out that President Garimella is undergoing his five-year review, so this might work to our advantage.

UA report (Alison Pechenick)

Here are the United Academics (UA) Executive Council (EC) report from Beth (attended 1/30/24) and Alison (attended 2/13/24).

1. The Full-time Faculty Bargaining Team's first bargaining session was on Feb 2nd. Retiree Joel Goldberg is serving as a consultant on the team. Jane Knodell, Bargaining Chair, informed the EC that she had met with representatives of RFAO (Alison and Beth), and is crafting language in response to that discussion.
2. Retirees are always welcome to participate with UA.
3. UA would like to take a grievance to the VLRB but they don't believe that it would be heard by the current board.
4. UA co-hosted a Burlington mayoral debate in 2/15.
5. The Board of Trustees has invited faculty and staff to provide feedback during President Garimella's five-year evaluation.

6. UA Legislative Affairs Committee members will testify today (2/21) in the Vermont House Education Committee hearing in support of HR.446, to “Democratize UVM’s Board” to add faculty and staff as voting members on the UVM Board of Trustees. This bill has overwhelming support from UVM’s faculty and staff unions, with large-majority approved resolutions by the Faculty Senate and SGA, and passed overwhelmingly in last year’s Vermont Senate. There is a similar bill in progress for VSU. A feeling was expressed that the UVM Board is becoming more a closed session with reduced input from faculty/staff, or even University Senate.

Senate Report (Mara Saule)

Faculty Senate Meeting, 1/22/24

Held remotely via Teams

The January 2024 meeting of the Faculty Senate was attended by approximately 100 participants via the Teams platform. The following items were discussed:

1. During his introductory remarks, Tom Borchert announced that the review committee to consider campus safety and academic freedom has been constituted and will report to the Senate in February or March.
2. The Consent Agenda presenting various program changes was passed, including several new minors, changes in credit hours required in programs, the uncontested deactivation of the Clinical Nurse Leaders Program.
3. A resolution in memoriam was read and passed for Prof. Frank Manchel, Professor Emeritus of English.
4. A proposal was presented for changes to the student attendance policy regarding out of class expectations. It will be voted on in February.
5. There was a presentation about a new Howard Hughes Medical Institute Teacher Training Grant designed to foster an inclusive and welcoming climate for students on campus.

Any attendant materials in support of the above agenda items can be found on the Faculty Senate website.

UBAC University Benefits Advisory Committee report (Ruth Farrell)

UBAC has been busy with two recent meetings, including first meeting of health insurance working group. Jane Knodell is now back as a UBAC member. At January meeting discussed and finalized two working groups (Health insurance group which Ruth is on) and employee wellness working group. Issue of faculty housing with new construction was raised. Raised issue that health insurance also includes retirees, and that the decision process by the University needs to be transparent. The 15% increase in premiums despite fewer claims is a concern (UVM self-insures). Will be meeting for SWOT discussion. Consultant from Hickock and Boardman made a presentation on employee-provided health insurance.

Alison raised question of involvement of BC/BS with the company that bought out Cigna MA portion. Hard to conceive how all this will work out by January 2025 when it is time for a new contract. Given that compressed timeline, Alan stressed need to have Chris Lehman and Liv Townsend have another meeting with RFAO to discuss all these issues very soon. We also need to know what proportion of retirees are not in Vermont. Judy will ask Beth Mintz to extend invitation to Chris and Liv.

Update on survey of retiree activities (Ralph Budd and Dwight Matthews)

The survey was highly successful in terms of responses from 122 of about 650 retired faculty (18.8%). Very preliminary analysis (survey closed just two days ago) shows that responses were across the spectrum of years retired, including one at 30 years post-retirement. Approximately 50% of retired faculty have been involved with publishing and mentoring. One recent retiree won a Tony Award for costume design of the Broadway hit “*Some Like it Hot.*”

New topic: Should we have a Spring Luncheon for retirees?

The group felt this was probably a good idea and should include a retiree guest speaker (e.g. winner of the Tony Award).

New Business. Alan proposed a resolution for a Zoom (or Teams)-only meeting with HR group in the very near future.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Ralph Budd

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Supplement: From Beth Mintz’s November memo to UA Bargaining Team:

Retired Faculty and Administrative Officers Organization
University of Vermont

Memo

To: United Academics Bargaining Team
From: RFAO
Date: November 17, 2023
Subject: Upcoming bargaining

In preparation for the upcoming Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiations, the Retired Faculty and Administrative Officers Organization would like to draw your attention to some of the issues of concern to retired faculty. Although we understand that UA cannot negotiate for retirees, some of our rights and privileges are specified in the CBA and, in this way, guaranteed to your members, when they retire. These include:

Email access

At present, use of UVM email is contractually guaranteed to retirees, but in past bargaining sessions, the administration has proposed an end to this practice. Thus far, this has been dropped in the final throes of bargaining, but recent events have us worried about losing this very important benefit. In recent years, retirees have lost access to university software and all IT support, and we fear that email may be next. Thus, we would like to underscore how important email is to retirees, as a vehicle for remaining active members of the UVM community. Please note that the lack of IT support occasionally raises difficulty for us when

UVM changes its email platform, and, thus, we wonder if you might consider raising email support for retirees as an issue to bring to the table.

Library journals

At present, the CBA guarantees retirees access to library books, but there is no mention of on-line materials. Although at present, accessing electronic journals and other resources has not been a problem, given our experience with losing software, it would really be nice to get this codified.

Health Care coverage costs

Last year, UVM switched from a Blue Cross/Blue Shield Medicare Advantage plan to one offered by CIGNA. A few of our members live in parts of the country where major providers refuse to accept or bill CIGNA and, therefore, those individuals effectively found themselves without insurance. Since UVM saved an enormous amount of money with this change, we think it fair for them to contribute to costs incurred by those who have had to forgo university coverage and purchase insurance on the open market.

Initial requests on this have been denied and we recently sent a letter to President Garimella reiterating our concerns. We have not yet gotten a response but, *if denied*, we wonder if you might consider raising this for future retirees. The number of people who have had to purchase insurance is small, but we worry about the precedent that this sets.

Parking

At present, the CBA specifies that retirees are entitled to campus parking. We understand that lack of parking is an enormous issue for faculty, and Parking Services often blames retirees for the problem. We do not believe that we are at fault, and we assume that a very limited number of retirees are on campus at any one time. Although we have asked that our presence be measured, Parking Services has not agreed to collect any data about this. Many retirees want to remain part of the larger UVM community and parking is crucial for this, especially since some are not as mobile as they once were.

Additionally, we would like to draw your attention to the question of parking fees. When we met with representatives from Parking Services, they did not seem to understand the progressive nature of campus parking fees, complaining that while retirees parked for free, their poorly paid employees were subject to fees. When we explained that the cost of parking was calculated as a percentage of wages and that retired faculty, who had subsidized those workers throughout their careers, no longer had a paycheck, this didn't seem salient.

In sum, then, we do not believe that retirees are responsible for the parking problems on campus, and we believe that we have paid our fair share for parking throughout our careers. We raise these issues, in case the administration brings them to the table.

Thank you for considering our requests. We look forward to hearing from you.

Submitted by Ralph Budd