

RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

March 20, 2024

Video Conference on ZOOM

MINUTES

Present: Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

Absent: Taka Ashikaga, Ralph Budd, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz

Call to Order: Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:04pm

1. Minutes of February 21, 2024, approved as amended.
2. RFAO Board Meeting
 - a. Liv Townsend (Retiree and Employee Engagement Coordinator) joined the Board meeting for a conversation. She was welcomed by Chair Gurdon.
 - i. By way of introduction, she said that she has been with HR at UVM for about 9 months and was an internal transfer to her current position. Since she had previously been working with retiree benefits it was a natural transition. Her current job description has 3 parts: 1) She is the liaison for all UVM retirees with Cigna. She meets with Cigna representatives bi-weekly and reviews claims; 2) She plans retiree engagement events and welcomes RFAO input; and 3) She coordinates employee recognition and staff awards. She is not a member of UBAC, where Caitlyn Sisler is the HR representative, but she is a member of the Summit Committee that works with UBAC. Currently Caitlyn is forwarding Cigna issues to her, so she is the first round of contact with Cigna and it is best to email her first. She will provide the Board with a recommended sequence of contacts that members should follow if they encounter problems with the Cigna health plan or its contractors such as for hearing or vision.
 - ii. She meets with Chris Lehman, the Chief Human Resources Officer, bi-weekly. One issue of interest to the Board is the problem some members have had finding satisfactory Cigna coverage. Chris and she are discussing a buy-out option in which the member would receive a buy-out payment in lieu of Cigna coverage. The member would not need to provide a reason. The member would be offered a renewal of the buy-out each November or if there has been a major life changing event. The general program will be available to all retirees but not tailored specifically to a member.
 - iii. She reported that Cigna has a new agreement with Birchwood for rehab services and no new patients have been turned away.
 - iv. She was asked by Board members whether VBA would be competitive in the next round of contract negotiations, whether the company that has acquired Cigna medicare advantage plans will work with BC/BS in more than the current 5 states, and whether the new company will be out of network with UVM too. HR does not have answers to these questions at present.
 - v. The Board again brought up the issue of inconsistent communication from UVM which harms retiree engagement. She said that she is looking into a newsletter for all retirees but will need to update a contact list. There remains a problem integrating our listserv with Communications to forward links to news from UVM.
 - vi. IT security remains a concern in general and more specifically as it relates to ex-employees. There is a question of who should have UVM email. There has been preliminary discussion of a separate email for retirees, perhaps with a link to UVM email. The Board was very concerned about this proposal because it would be highly disruptive for retirees. It was pointed out that many retirees remain academically active at UVM and function like

employees without a paycheck. The Board felt that there should be early discussion with Chris Lehman regarding this proposal.

- vii. The final topic was retiree engagement. The Board may reinstate a spring luncheon with a speaker. Liv was supportive of this plan and offered to help with arrangements. Holding the meeting at UVM may be faster to schedule but more costly than the previous venue, Delta hotel. There will be enquires of both. The meeting could include a table for Cigna representatives to answer questions.
- b. Faculty Senate Report (Mara). There was a small turnout for the February 26th regular and special meeting. There was a call for nominations. In memoriam were held for Plant and Soil Science Emeritus Professor Norman Pellett and History Professor Frank Nicosia. There were two roundtable discussions. The first topic was the 5-year review of President Garimella and input from the Faculty Senate, and the second was the role of the Faculty Senate in the future. The next meeting is March 25th. Mara was asked if the Faculty Senate has an ombudsman to help negotiate health plan problems; she will look into this and report back.
- c. United Academics Update (Alison). United Academics leadership continues to work hard and professionally on behalf of full- and part-time faculty.
 - i. Negotiations are currently underway for the full-time unit. The bargaining team has woven our health insurance concerns (conveyed after being vetted by RFAO Exec) into proposed language falling within Article 20 (Benefits) of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and will bring that to the table during the Article 20 bargaining session later this month.
 - ii. The H.446 proposed legislation (faculty and staff voting seats on UVM Board of Trustees) was not voted upon in the House Education Committee before “crossover” (bills must leave their committees by this date), but there is still a path forward for the legislation during the current session. UA encourages any interested retirees to lobby their legislators in support of this endeavor.
- d. UBAC Report (Ruth) There was no fall meeting but working groups are meeting. The Health Insurance Working Group heard from Steve May from Hickok-Boardman. He said that UVM is self-insured for health insurance with an umbrella policy to cover very large claims. The UVM plan is administered by BC/BS. Last year UVM paid out \$75 million in claims. Any further attempts at cost containment would involve benefits and the structure of the policy.
- e. Discussion of the Retiree Survey and ideas regarding how the results should be used. There was an impressive response to the survey that provides an opportunity to talk about retiree contributions to UVM. There is a need to communicate this information to the President and to the Foundation. This will be discussed further at the next meeting.
- f. Other business. The Board will look into holding a spring-early summer luncheon, perhaps the first week in June. The meeting will include a speaker and a table for Cigna. There was a discussion of possible speakers. Chair Gurdon and Secretary/Treasurer Branda will investigate possible venues.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: April 17, 2024, at 2pm.

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda