

RFAO President's Report to the RFAO Membership

Presented at the RFAO Annual General Meeting, November 5, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Since my report a year ago the Executive Board has continued its activities in the same manner as in the previous year. That is, via virtual monthly meetings, supplemented by more regular e-mail exchanges. This has worked quite well. We have still managed to stay in touch with senior university officials. As examples we have had as guests Provost Patty Prelock, V-P of Finance & Administration Richard Cate, Chief Information Officer Simeon Ananou, Libraries Dean Bryn Geffert, and key managers from Human Resources.

The main event within the past 12 months has clearly been the switchover in our retiree health care insurance. The Board was informed after the fact that the UVM health plan is put out for competitive bid every five years. Following that process the university selected Blue Cross/Blue Shield which had offered a customized Medicare Advantage Plan for UVM retirees which would replace the former model of Traditional Medicare with supplemental coverage through BC/BS. The new arrangement was attractive to the university because of the cost savings involved (in the range of \$2 million plus) but was couched as to the benefit of retirees given a 20% reduction in premiums paid for the same level of coverage. Together with the Human Resources department we organized a set of informational webinars with the Vermont Blue Advantage executives in order to channel questions and concerns from the membership.

I think it is fair to say that there have been teething issues with the change which is perhaps not totally surprising. Members of the Board as well as others who have reached out to us experienced those issues, ranging from gaps in the knowledge of the particularities of our customized plan among some of the customer service employees at the Michigan call center, to procedure codes that were not initially included, to difficulties for some in the transition to ExpressScripts, to a few instances of providers no longer recognized as Medicare-eligible. It is not known just how extensive such problems have been across the entire membership, but whenever an individual did approach myself or another member of the Board, the issue was raised either with UVM Human Resources or directly with the President of Vermont Blue Advantage. My impression is that the level of frustration has now been reduced. One other positive piece of news is that the premium for 2022 will see no increase.

A second health care item of note is the recent announcement of the availability of eyecare coverage for retirees. This Vision Care Plan was introduced for active employees two years ago and some of us were annoyed that it was not open to those faculty and staff who had retired. This has now been rectified and so those who find that they need to purchase frames and lenses on a regular basis personally or in their family situation might well evaluate this coverage as being to their benefit.

Apart from healthcare, the one other major topic which has caught the Board's attention has been retiree access to software. We invested considerable time in communicating in-person and electronically, especially with Richard Cate and Simeon Ananou. We also conducted a

survey of those of our colleagues who continue to engage in scholarship and general research to gain some baseline data on the utilization of various software programs. Despite our efforts I'm not sure that we made as much progress here as I would have hoped. The university administration has seemingly taken the decision to limit retiree access to software and information technology support, citing cost, cybersecurity and inadequate IT staffing. It has also been made abundantly clear that we are not regarded as "affiliates" for licensing purposes when contracts with software vendors are established.

This actually provides a segue to my next observation. I mentioned in my last report that the RFAO had gained representation on the faculty union's executive committee. Early this year United Academics amended their own constitution to explicitly permit the RFAO organization to be represented with a non-voting member. It has been extremely valuable for us to have a seat at that table because we can be alerted when topics arise in the lead-up to negotiations that can directly impact retiree interests, not only in terms of health care, but things such as parking privileges or continued use of our UVM e-mail accounts.

Finally, there were a couple of recent happenings which represented a step back to some sense of normality. President Garimella resumed the tradition of holding a luncheon to celebrate the contributions of retired faculty and administrators. This always pleasant event, held in mid-August, attracted a very respectable number of colleagues. The other was the provision of funds to support continued scholarly endeavors via the Retired Scholars Award Program. Let me hereby repeat my call for submissions given the deadline of November 22nd.

Respectfully submitted,

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