Welcome to 2007-2008

As we return from summer break, we find ourselves entering one of the most (if not the most) challenging times in our history. Our governor is determined to solve the state’s fiscal crisis on the backs of state employees. The College, along with most state departments, faces what appears to be a string of difficult budget years. The Carcieri administration had a number of options for dealing with the budget, but Unfortunately chose to exploit the situation to attack working people rather than collaborate with unions to solve the problems. The labor community sat with representatives of the governor for numerous meetings over the last year, to explore ways organized labor could assist the state with its financial woes; the governor abruptly ended those meetings in May.

As is always the case, our contract remains in place until a successor agreement is negotiated. All conditions in the contract remain the same. It is our expectation that a new agreement will be retroactive to July 1, 2007.

Negotiations

The contract between the RIC/AFT and the Board of Governors for Higher Education expired on June 30, 2007. On March 31, a letter was sent to the BoG initiating the collective bargaining process. As we reported in May, a number of efforts have been undertaken:

- The Program Development Committee, mostly composed of departmental representatives, surveyed the faculty regarding priorities for negotiations. The results were sent to the Negotiating Committee.
- A membership meetings was held in the spring to review negotiations processes, gather additional input and update membership about the status of negotiations.

A Negotiating Committee was established. The members are Michael Mullane (RIFT staff, chief negotiator), Jason Blank, Carol Shelton, Dante Del Giudice and Robert Cvornyek. As we reported in May, the RIC administration team consists of Mark Motte, Ivy Locke, Richard Prull, Earl Simson, James Schweikart and Ann Marie Coleman (BoG).

The Council of Higher Education, which consists of all the unions under the BoG, has been reconvened, to coordinate collective bargaining across all units, as we did in 2004. This group has met frequently over the summer. This group is also part of the coalition of organizations working to defeat the governor’s anti-union budget “solutions.”
URI AAUP had their first negotiations session on August 16. CCRI NEA will meet with state negotiators on August 28. Our first meeting is expected to occur in early September. The delays have been caused by the uncertainty of the final state budget, not the least of which is a BoG audit into post-retirement health insurance plans. We anticipate coalition bargaining with respect to fringe benefits and possibly salaries.

The ProJo notwithstanding, our faculty is not adequately paid for their service to their students and the state. Full professors at RIC average $70,076. Associate professors average $61,426. Assistant professors average $50,607. Instructors average $38,958. RIC salaries (from instructor to president) are well below their counterparts in similar institutions across the country, especially in New England. And we live in one of the most expensive housing markets in the country. In the last dozen years, we have seen our buying power decrease, yet we remain targets for governor after governor. In addition, health insurance premiums were instituted two years ago, and have risen, starting July, 2007. Hardly adequate compensation for professionals; shameful treatment of people who contribute so much to this state.

There Was No Pay Cut
All state employees experienced a reduction in take-home pay on July 1. This was caused by the state having suspended medical insurance co-shares for the last four pay periods of FY 2007, and compensating on July 1. For those four pay periods, in May and June, each faculty member received higher net checks than in prior months, due to this bookkeeping trick (the state saved its share of co-shares also). As of now, medical insurance co-pays revert to April levels, plus a 5.3% increase in health insurance premiums instituted on July 1, as per state law (legal within the terms of our contract).

Unfunded Mandates
Department chairs’ summer administration compensation was unilaterally decreased. More work was passed on to chairs and faculty than in previous years (e.g., accreditation and assessment). Meanwhile, as vacancies are not filled, more and more tasks are likely to be passed on to faculty. If you are given assignments above and beyond your contractual responsibilities, please contact the RIC/AFT before taking any action on your own.

Bon Voyage
During the academic year, 14 faculty members began their retirements. We wish the following retirees healthy and fulfilling new careers:

- Lenore Collins (Communications)
- Richard Dickson (Special Education)
- John Dimeo (Elementary Education)
- Judith Dimeo (Elementary Education)
- David Greene (Physical Science)
- Charles Owens (Biology)
- George Pamental (Management and Marketing)
- John Perkins (Counselor Education)
- Willis Poole (Educational Studies)
- Helen Salzberg (Math and Computer Science)
- Albert Salzberg (English)
- Caroline Sullivan (Math and Computer Science)
- Marilyn Sylvestre (Accounting and CIS)
- David Woolman (Adams Library)

Jason L. Blank, President