Negotiations: Mixed Progress

Eleven higher education unions are bargaining in unison with the Board of Governors for Higher Education concerning issues of health benefits and wages. In 2004, we all bargained together around health benefits; this year we are cooperating in negotiating for wages also. Unions representing faculty and professional staff at all three institutions have met separately with BoG representatives, and collaboratively with each other to hammer out proposals. At this date, we can report that serious proposals have been exchanged among the parties. While no specific agreements have been reached, all the union representatives are mildly optimistic that issues concerning wages and health benefits will be resolved favorably in the near future.

This has been a particularly difficult year for contract negotiations. It is public knowledge that the state faces even more severe shortfalls than any time in memory, yet contract talks with BoG representatives have been productive to this point. Negotiation sessions between the coalition and the BoG began in early November and were held almost weekly until the holidays. They are expected to resume in January.

The RIC/AFT met with BoG representatives twice in December, to negotiate all issues other than wages and health benefits. Those talks were delayed because both sides were waiting for information about available resources for higher education. Proposals were exchanged and meeting schedules were set.

We anticipate that contract talks will resume in January, and that a proposal can be presented to faculty before spring break. While this may seem protracted, in the past we have gone more than a year without a new contract. This time around, there is reason for both sides to be deliberate and measured, as we are trying to reach agreements that can meet the needs of higher education employees within the fiscal realities facing the state. The process is exacting, marked by small sequential steps. For some of our members, such as those awaiting promotional increments, we recognize that this is an excruciatingly slow process. We can only emphasize that the special environment in which we are trying to settle a contract calls for a progressive dialogue with the BoG. The results are likely to be favorable in the end.

Needless to say, the RIC/AFT wishes to enhance the Contract and the BoG wishes to recover some costs incurred by the current Contract. NLRB regulations prevent us from discussing details of contract talks in public. However, should an impasse occur, a RIC/AFT membership meeting will be convened immediately.

As is always the case, our contract remains in place until a successor agreement is negotiated. All conditions in the contract remain the same.
Other Announcements

**Faculty Development Workshop**
The Faculty Development Workshop is scheduled for Wednesday, January 16th 8 AM – Noon, in Alger 110. From the College’s Web Site:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30am</td>
<td>Full Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15am</td>
<td>Welcoming Remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Keynote Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30am</td>
<td>Closing Remarks</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

RSVP by Monday, January 7, 2008
by phone: Dolores Bresette, 456-8141; by email: dbresette@ric.edu

**Reweaving the Safety Net**
We encourage all faculty members to attend a “safety net” workshop, conducted by the staff of the Counseling Center. I found the information to be invaluable.

From Tom Lavin (Director of the Counseling Center): All faculty and staff who have not yet attended are invited to participate in a workshop on recognizing and responding to troubled and distressed students. This program will be offered by Counseling Center staff on 3 dates:

- Wednesday, January 16, 1pm to 2:30, Alger 110
- Friday, January 18, 10:30am to noon, Faculty Center
- Tuesday, February 12, 4 to 5:30pm, Alger 110

Please select one of the dates that fits your schedule and register by phoning or e-mailing Patricia Patrick at 456-8094, ppatrick@ric.edu. Note that the first program, on Jan. 16, will follow the Annual Faculty Development Workshop, and a light lunch will be offered. Light refreshments will be offered for the 2nd and 3rd dates.

We wish all faculty, staff and administration a happy and healthy New Year. May you live long and prosper.

Jason L. Blank, President