Contract Ballots Due Feb. 16

By now, every RIC/AFT member should have received, at home by mail, a ballot for voting on the tentative agreement announced last week. In your mailing was an embossed ballot, a return envelope to the Union, and a Newsletter describing the components of the T.A. If you have not received this mailing, please call the RIC/AFT office immediately (ext. 9842). Ballots are due in the Union office, on Monday, Feb. 16, 12 Noon. Be sure to check only one of the spaces: accept or reject the T.A.

Two informational RIC/AFT membership meetings were held on Tuesday, Jan. 27. The T.A. was fully described at those meetings, as well as in the last Newsletter. If you have any questions before voting please call the Union office, ext. 9842.

Faculty Roles in the College

Questions have come from several quarters regarding the extent to which faculty members and the Union have been involved in recent events and decisions on campus. Specifically, changes in the Thorp Award and the recently-begun Strategic Planning process have raised concerns about the role(s) we play in decision-making.

These two current examples, Thorp and Strategic Planning, were initiated by the administration, with faculty involvement coming so late that major decisions had already been made. Some “old timers” can remember a much higher level of shared governance and collegiality between faculty and administration. There was a time when administration members would include faculty members from the onset of an issue, to problem-solve and brainstorm. Those discussions were collegial, non-binding and productive. This process also underscored the recognition of faculty as valued members of the institution. Even if faculty ideas didn’t find their way into ultimate decisions, their expertise and shared commitment to the College were respected and utilized. But we seem to have devolved into a fairly consistent pattern of top-down decision-making, characterized by a process of faculty being excluded from dialogue whose outcome directly affects us. So these days, increasing numbers of faculty members openly express their feelings of distance from the administration. Consequently, faculty often find themselves in a reactive, rather than reflective, posture. This is both unhealthy and unwise. We’re partners in the work that goes on here, yet we are increasingly alienated from the institution. Also, the skills and expertise of the faculty are excluded from decision-making.

The Thorp case is particularly illustrative. Here, the administration decided to save money and proposed the establishment of a single award, without even consulting faculty members (including former Thorp Award recipients) until the near-end of the process, when only the details were open for modification. Had Thorp
Professors, or other faculty, been asked for input, the administration would have heard what we did in a Departmental Representatives meeting last week: Faculty members do not receive administration’s recognition for the work we do over and beyond the letters of the Contract. Faculty members value and deserve recognition; remuneration is a separate, albeit important, factor. So, there may have been more constructive solutions than one annual award for a full professor.

As a consequence, faculty sometimes turn to the Union to respond to the administration’s unilateralism. Briefly stated, if it’s not contractual, our recourse is to raise it as any other campus organization would. And we have always done so. There are several possible solutions to this unfortunate scenario. Number one: we call upon the administration to return to the earlier practice of involving the faculty and the staff, at the very beginning of processes that affect us. Second: we should explore the possibility of expanding, rather than reducing, faculty achievement awards, ultimately for inclusion in the Contract.

We recognize that the administration does appreciate the faculty, as evidenced by its record of obtaining resources in contract negotiations, and in other interactions with individual faculty members. We propose that this recognition be extended to routine processes that occur on the campus.

**Income Tax Information**

For the year 2003, RIC/AFT members paid $486.40 in union dues. Agency fee members paid $431.74. This expenses may be deductible for income tax purposes. Please check with your preparer.

**Announcements**

There will be a RIFTHP seminar on February 2\(^{nd}\), addressing the Family Medical Leave Act. For information, call the Union Office.

On Feb. 24\(^{th}\), 26\(^{th}\) and Mar. 2\(^{nd}\), there will be workshops on Workers Compensation, conducted by the RI Department of Labor and Training, at the Pastore Center, 1511 Pontiac Ave., Cranston. Call the RIC/AFT for information and to register.

Crist Costa and Jason Blank will be attending Blue Cross/Blue Shield’s Third Labor Symposium, entitled Trends in Health Care: Choices for the Future, on Feb. 13\(^{th}\), at the RI Convention Center. We anticipate that BC/BS will roll out a new health care product at that meeting.

**Next Issue**

We are planning another issue of the Newsletter in mid- to late-February. It will include an announcement of the Contract vote, a tribute to Paul Sherlock, and a list of faculty who have been awarded sabbatical leaves for the academic year 2004-2005. The deadline for submitting materials is noon, Friday, Feb. 13, at the Union office or dweisman@ric.edu.

Jason L. Blank, President