Tentative Agreement Reached

On January 12, 2004, the RIC/AFT and the Board of Governors for Higher Education reached a one year tentative agreement for the period of July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004. This agreement could not have been reached without the involvement of President Nazarian.

The agreement is variously labeled a “roll-over” or a “gap contract.” Under this rubric, all the articles contained in the previous contract (2000-2003) remain in effect, with a few modifications. There is no salary increase under the T.A. and no new items are introduced (e.g., a proposed new benefit).

The T.A. is a one-page document consisting of six items:

1. “Extend the 2000-2003 collective bargaining agreement through June 30, 2004, with no across the board salary increases and continuation of existing health insurance benefits offered through the Department of Administration (including the prescription drug co-payment schedule negotiated with the health insurance provider).” This item is a continuation of the language of the previous contract and obviously does not include the negotiated reimbursement for drug co-payments. This means that current co-payment levels will remain in effect at least through June 30, 2004.

2. “The Board of Governors shall establish a system-wide labor management committee on health insurance. The RIC/AFT agrees to participate on this committee and will appoint two members to it. This committee will be charged with studying ways to achieve cost efficiencies, improve the health insurance plans, and improve benefit utilization. The committee will engage consultants to assist in its work. This committee shall complete its charge and make recommendations to the Board and the Unions for the negotiation of successor agreements no later than April 1, 2004.” The full committee will include representatives of the BoG and all the unions which negotiate with the Board. This is the first time we will be able to affect change and be full partners in the negotiations of health benefits.

3. “Faculty Development Fund - $75,000, implemented as per 2000-2003 Agreement.” The provisions for the implementation of this item can be found on Page 67 of the 2000-2003 Contract. In addition, the criteria that were negotiated and the committee structure that was negotiated, will remain in effect. This means that faculty will apply to the committee (three faculty members and two administrators), individually or in groups, for grants. Most importantly, faculty can apply for grants for activities which began any time after July 1, 2003!!  Application procedures will be announced very soon.
4. “President’s Salary Adjustments Fund - $100,000, to be awarded as per 2000-2003 Agreement.” See Page 63 of the 2000-2003 Agreement. Please note that such increments accrue to the members’ salary base.

5. “Tuition remission for domestic partners.”

6. “The Board agrees that in the event any across the board increases are negotiated with any other Board bargaining unit during the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the same proposal will be offered to the RIC/AFT.” This parity clause appears in every contract. To date, no union has received any across-the-board increases.

**Additional Information**

Separate from the T.A., the President will send a “side letter” to the Union in which he will state his attempt to increase the amount of money in the Faculty Research Fund. This will be in addition to the $77,500 already committed to the fund, emanating from the RIC Foundation, RIC alumni, and other sources.

Upon the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement, Section 10.3 of the Agreement will be changed to read: “A faculty member may be assigned a load greater or less than the average in a particular semester, but the College shall hold to its policy that an individual faculty load shall average twelve (12) formula hours during the four (4) semesters beginning Fall, 2003 and ending Spring, 2005.”

**The Process**

Two informational meetings will be held with members of the RIC/AFT on January 27, at 12:30 PM and 4:00 PM in Forman C to explain the T.A. and to answer questions. Ballots will be mailed to all RIC/AFT members’ homes. The ballots are due back in the Union office, 12 Noon on Feb. 16, 2004. It has been a tradition of this Union to employ mail balloting so that every member has the chance to vote.

The Negotiating Committee unanimously recommended the T.A. to the Executive Committee. All eight members of the Executive Committee who could be reached recommend the T.A. to the faculty for ratification.

As President of the RIC/AFT, I hope that you will review the T.A. carefully, attend one of the membership meetings, share any concerns or questions, and then vote favorably on this proposal.

Jason L. Blank, President

**Sad News**

We all were saddened to hear of the passing of Paul Sherlock, long-time state legislator, RIC faculty member and namesake of the College’s Sherlock Center on Disabilities. Paul was a magnificent friend of Rhode Island College, a friend and advisor to the RIC/AFT, and a friend of all persons with special needs. Another issue of this Newsletter is planned for this or next week, and will include a tribute to Paul. Our heartfelt condolences are extended to the Sherlock family.