Tentative Agreement Reached; Contract Ballots Due Sept. 14

By now, every RIC/AFT member has received a ballot to vote for or against the Tentative Agreement announced on Wednesday, August 24. [If you have not received a ballot, call the Union office immediately – 456-9842.] The completed ballots are due in the Union office by Noon, Sept. 14. The official count, conducted by Victor Profugi, will begin soon after Noon. All RIC/AFT members are welcome to observe the counting.

The Board of Governors is expected to ratify all higher education contracts on Sept. 19, assuming each unit has approved its respective T.A.

Summary of the Contract

The T.A., a three year contract proposal (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2007), calls for a 1% across the board salary increase, and a 2.5% “equity adjustment), amounting to 3.5%, retroactive to July 1, 2004 for every faculty member. In years two and three, faculty members would receive salary increases of 3.5% in each year. Health insurance premium co-pays would kick-in on July 1, 2005. The co-pays would be calculated on each person’s gross salary and choice of individual or family coverage. Premiums for individual plan subscribers range from $304 to $405 in 2005-2006, and $501 to $613 in 2006-2007 (depending on income). Premiums for family plan members range from $566 to $1,132 in 2005-2006, and $934 to $1,712 in 2006-2007. These are pre-tax numbers, so actual impacts on net pay will be about 30% less.

Promotional increments would increase by about 9%; summer school by 9.1%; continuing education rates by 10.72%. The President’s Salary Adjustments Fund would be $100,000 for each year of the contract, including 2004-2005. The Faculty Development Fund would receive $45,000 in 2005-2006 and $45,000 in 2006-2007.

Other Contract issues include:
- The department chair stipend range increases from the current $2,252 - $3941 to $4,000 - $6,000, and an extra $1,000 per year for a second consecutive term; the load credit range increases from 3-6 credits in 2004-2005, to 4-9 credits in this academic year.
- The RIC administration will provide at least 48 faculty load credits each semester for faculty scholarship, creative endeavors, public service and/or applied research, including research on student performance, (e.g., portfolios and assessment).
• A new sick leave bank will be established.
• Maternity, parental and family leave have been specified.
• Faculty load average of 12 formula hours per semester would begin in the current semester, and end in the spring, 2007 semester.
• Three study committees will be established: faculty load credit at HBS; intellectual property rights; students’ evaluations of courses.

Contract Process

The BoG offered the RIC/AFT, a member of a coalition of public higher education unions, a proposal concerning wages and health insurance benefits on August 29. The Negotiating Committee and the Executive Committee voted to recommend approval of the offer a day later. On August 31, a RIC/AFT membership meeting was held, at which the details of the offer were reviewed. At that meeting, RIC/AFT President Jason L. Blank urged members to approve the T.A. Ballots were mailed on Friday, Sept. 2, and are due back in the office at Noon, Sept. 14.

Earlier in the negotiating cycle, the URI faculty union accepted an offer from the BoG. The RIC/AFT - BoG T.A. is identical to that reached at URI in terms of wages and health insurance. Some other details vary because of specific workplace differences between the two schools.

A Newsletter, the RIC/AFT website and emails to members will announce the voting results on Sept. 15.

At the August 31 membership meeting, Jason Blank announced that this edition of the Newsletter would include any faculty commentary on the T.A., pro or con. No correspondence has arrived. At that meeting, Jason also announced that the Coalition would begin immediately to deal with the issue of inadequate salaries across the board. That process has begun; volunteers should contact the office.

Other Announcements

We are sorry to report that Mike Mullane’s father passed away on Saturday, Sept. 3. Mike is the RIFT staff representative who is also our chief negotiator. Condolences can be sent to Michael and Celeste Mullane, 103 Dartmouth Ave., Warwick, RI 02888.

Condolences to Joan Glazer, whose beloved husband, Wesley Miller, died late last week. Joan retired from the Elementary Education Department last year. Messages of sympathy may be sent to 59 Pond View Dr., Warwick, RI 02886.

The national AFT, in cooperation with the AFL-CIO, has established the AFT Katrina Union Community Fund. To contribute, contact the RIC/AFT office.

Jason L. Blank, President

Commentary: Reflections on the Contract Offer

I watched the contract negotiations from the sidelines, coming in a few times during the summer to consult with Jason and others, and to put out a Newsletter updating the membership on contract progress. As an Executive Committee member, I learned of the agreement during the weekend preceding the public announcement.

I have more concerns than feelings of satisfaction about the T.A. My concerns about the proposal are that, in spite of Jason’s heroic efforts, we are giving back almost as much as we will gain, and the future,
to me, looks like more concessions than gains now that the co-pay door is open. I also believe that after inflation most of us may lose ground over the course of the new Contract. I am particularly concerned about those faculty members whose salaries are so low that they are taking second jobs just to cover the increasing costs of living.

Yet, my primary perspective is the hard work that went into “winning” the agreement, over what I perceive to be very difficult odds. [I predicted to Jason and others that we would join CCRI on the picket lines on September 1.] During the summer, Jason worked tirelessly to get us a contract he and we could live with, in a political atmosphere that mitigated against his wishes. Need I remind you that the Governor sent us all letters in the spring effectively urging us to disregard our leadership and take whatever the state would offer?

Hard work is one thing, and a necessary antecedent to effectiveness. When it looked like we would be coerced into give-backs without any gains, Jason and President John Nazarian initiated communications with the BoG to move the process along and to gain an equitable contract.

Every contract cycle, we acknowledge the role played by President Nazarian, and this year is no exception. What is different this time is Jason’s efforts to accomplish salary, benefit and workplace language in what I perceived to be a hostile negotiating environment at the state level. In the end, Jason persevered.

Dan Weisman, Editor