

Fifth CURAC Atlantic Regional Conference

1 October 2011

St. Mary's University, Halifax, NS

“Engaging with Your Community, Your University and Your Mind”



1. Delegates gather for coffee and registration



2 Geraldine Thomas

Geraldine Thomas, President of the St. Mary's University Retirees Association, and former SMURA President **Ron Cosper** welcomed delegates in English et en français. Geraldine then introduced **Colin Dodds**, President of St. Mary's University.



3 Ron Cosper



4 SMU President
Colin Dodds

In his welcoming remarks, **President Dodds** suggested that retirees could help their institutions in recruiting new faculty, as well as by donating to them. He regretted that higher education is not a higher priority with the provincial government and suggested that retirees might lobby their MLAs to increase the level of government support.

Ron Cosper then introduced **Leonard Preyra**, a former member of the Department of Political Science at Saint Mary's who is now a government MLA in the Nova Scotia Legislature, to speak on “Engaging with Your Community.” Preyra regretted that governments often see seniors as a burden (needing pensions, benefits, more health care, assistance in coping with daily life, etc.). Rarely do they recognize that retirees have “social capital” (knowledge, skills, “know-how”) that could be used to benefit the community. As an MLA, he often sees not-retirees who face challenges that retirees could help them address. The challenge is to develop systems to make use of this resource.



5 Leonard Preyra

Preyra noted that university retirees often want to maintain their intellectual connections with students, colleagues and their disciplines. Many also want to exercise and develop other skills. Again, systems need to be developed to accommodate these desires. The Seniors' College Association of Nova Scotia (SCANS) offers the opportunity to fulfill some of these desires.

A delegate noted that municipalities are often not ready to use retiree volunteers, and asked if the Province could help. Preyra noted that the government has a Seniors' Secretariat, but people and organizations need help to learn where resources are available and how to apply for them. Another delegate said that another contribution retirees can offer is mentoring. Preyra agreed, noting that an immigrant, for example, might face a specific challenge that a mentor could assist with, but systems for doing this need to be developed.



6 Ian Murray

Randy Barkhouse, President of the Association of Dalhousie Retirees and Pensioners (ADRP) next introduced **Ian Murray**, Executive Director, Alumni Affairs and Advancement, Acadia University, to speak on "Engaging with your University." Murray said that groups wishing to be effective in engaging with their institution need to have specific answers to two questions:

- What do you want to do?
- Why do you want to do it?

Retiree Associations may have many objectives of their own (providing social events for retirees, being a channel of communication between the institution and retirees, improving the situation of retirees, engaging retirees in the life of the institution, etc.). If they wish to engage the institution to support a project, the association should be able to present a specific plan that

- Supports a stated institutional objective
- Adds value, not workload, to the institution
- Shows who will be doing what, how extensive their involvement will be, and what support they will expect or need

A delegate suggested that sponsorship by another organization in the institution (the Faculty Association for example) can help. Howard Fink (Concordia) noted that his recent survey across Canada revealed that 18 of 20 Canadian university faculty associations who replied to his survey allow retirees to join as Associate Members.

Murray closed his remarks by advising Associations not to try to hijack institutional programs for their own purposes.

Following a coffee break, delegates returned for a series of reports from individual Retiree Associations.



7 Bob McCarthy

Bob McCarthy (Acadia – RAFA) said that the Retired Acadia Faculty Association (RAFA) has a number of social activities for members through the year. It has – so far, unsuccessfully – tried to restore free parking on campus for retirees, and also tried to make it easier for retired faculty to continue to teach, where there is departmental need. The latter is difficult because of collective agreements.

Randy Barkhouse (Dalhousie – ADRP) said that ADRP has about 300 members. They found that there was limited interest in social events, so they have stopped



8 Randy Barkhouse

sponsoring them. They have noted that many members participate (as learner-teachers or teacher-learners) in SCANS classes and that participants in a class often go out for a meal together afterward. ADRP has focused on preserving the Blue Cross benefits of retirees, and was successful in gaining a rebate for excess premiums paid by retirees over a number of years. ADRP wants to gain inclusion of retirees in the administration of the Dalousie Pension Plan, where their legal rights are weak or non-existent. A challenge they face is recruiting new members into ADRP.



9 Ed Williams

Ed Williams (Memorial – MUNPA) reported that the Memorial University of Newfoundland Pensioners Association has existed since 1985. All Memorial retirees are included as MUNPA members, giving them a membership of about 1500, approximately equally divided between faculty and staff. Membership fees are voluntary, and about 900 members pay them by automatic payroll deduction from their pensions. The University recognizes MUNPA as a “department”, ensuring that they are not omitted from important internal communications. Ed announced that MUNPA will be hosting the 2013 CURAC Conference, and invited everyone to come to St. John’s for it.



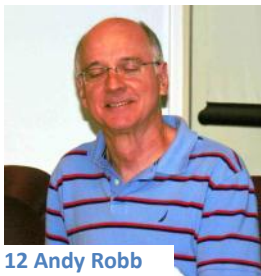
10 Maurice Rainville

Maurice Rainville (Moncton – ABPPRUM [retraités]) said that ABPPRUM was founded in 1997 and now has about 200 retired faculty and librarians as members. Their monthly luncheons have proven to be successful social events. They are hampered in their recruiting by the University’s refusal to give them a list of retirees. Retirees are not represented on the Pension Committee, so they work to keep retirees in the Faculty Association to watch the pension plan.



11 David Wiesel (front)

David Wiesel (UNB – UNBREA) said that the University of New Brunswick Retired Employees Association offers a “Value Pak” for its members. UNBREA is involved in reviewing the University’s Strategic Plan, it assists in Orientation in helping incoming students’ transition to the University, organizes pre-retirement sessions for employees, and is working to be included in any discussion of revisions to retiree benefits. Their challenge is recruiting new activists to succeed the Association’s founders.



12 Andy Robb

Andy Robb (UPEI – Association of Retired UPEI Employees) said that all UPEI retirees are eligible to join their 14-year-old association, and about 40% choose to do so. They have Observer Status on the Pension Advisory and Benefits Committees but few other formalized relations with the University. Their social events include a summer BBQ and a golf tournament, and a winter lecture and lunch event. Their main challenge is how to engage individual retirees.

Since this session was running longer than scheduled, we broke at this point for lunch, provided by St Mary’s University.



13 Delegates at Lunch

After lunch, **Tony Farrell** (SMU – SMURA) said that their association offers a forum for continuing cross-disciplinary collaboration among retirees. Their events include a party and pot-luck lunch held at a member's house, an annual seminar on financial aspects of retirement (hosted by TD Investments), open lunches at area restaurants, and reports by retirees on their ongoing research. There is a "lounge" for SMURA members on campus. The SMU Pension Plan is a pure Defined Contribution plan and each retiree manages his/her own investments. Retirees have no health benefits provided by the University.



14 Howard Fink

The session ended with a report by **Howard Fink** (Concordia and CURAC) of the situation in Québec. He outlined the history of membership in CURAC by Québec retiree associations. Following the dissolution of the two associations of francophone associations, he has been working to bring associations from individual francophone universities. To this end, he is hoping to be able to organize a Québec Regional CURAC Conference in the Fall of 2013. He reported that there have been a number of attempts to reduce the pensions and benefits of Québec post-secondary retirees in recent years. The Concordia Association was founded in 1973!

In response to a question about teaching after retirement, **Tony Farrell and Geraldine Thomas** (SMU) said that teaching assignments are given to faculty employees first, followed by Adjuncts. This makes it unlikely that retirees will be offered the opportunity to teach, even though they may be the most qualified individuals.



15 George Brandie

Next, **George Brandie** (CURAC President) said that Associations are always very interested in hearing about the successes (and challenges) at other Associations. He commended this Regional Conference for fostering such communication, and announced that he will be inviting Associations from across the country to contribute material to a new section of the CURAC Website (<http://www.curac.ca>) aimed specifically at such communication. He said that he will create a page (or pages) for each Association to describe themselves and outline one or two of their successful initiatives, along with their challenges. Another goal of CURAC is to advocate on behalf of retirees on issues of interest. Brandie noted that for such advocacy to be successful, out positions must be based on real expertise, and presented in ways most likely to be successful. He noted that the CURAC Directors need to draw upon the expertise of the members of our

Associations, and he asked Associations to assist CURAC in finding individuals willing to volunteer their time and expertise on our mutual behalf.



16 Honouring Tarun Ghose

Finally, **George Brandie** presented a certificate of appreciation and a small gift to Dalhousie's **Tarun Ghose**, who has been actively engaged with CURAC since before its founding. He served as a Director and President of the Association, and has been the long-time Chair of its Healthcare Policy Committee. On behalf of the CURAC Board, George thanked Tarun for his tireless work on behalf of the Association.



17 A pleased honoree



18 Julie Dowling

The next session – “Engaging Your Mind: Operation of Seniors’ Colleges” – featured three speakers.

Julie Dowling (UPEI) described the Seniors’ College of PEI (SCPEI), the oldest such organization in Canada. In operation for ten years, it now offers about 160 courses in each of their Fall, Winter and Spring semesters, which she described as “seniors (those over age 50) teaching seniors.” An senior in PEI can buy a \$125 annual membership, which entitles that person to take as many courses as he/she wishes during the year. They now have about 600 paid members, mostly in the major municipalities of PEI. They are able to pay course coordinators \$300

per course, and they have no lack of volunteers (not all university retirees) willing to teach. They now even have a surplus that could cover the loss of their government funding if necessary. SCPEI is affiliated with the Lifelong Learning Sept. of UPEI.



20 Ken Rozee

Ken Rozee (Dalhousie) said that the Seniors College Association of Nova Scotia (SCANS) said that SCANS was modelled on SCPEI. ACANMS has about 400 members. They offer about 40 courses a semester, but their courses are all “academic” – they have chosen to not offer any “how to” courses. SCANS has no relationship with Dalhousie.



19 Peter Russell

Peter Russell (Toronto) said that the Seniors’ College at University of Toronto grew out of an annual “Senior Scholars’ Seminar” at which retired scholars presents reports on their ongoing research. When some asked, “Why don’t we do this more frequently?”, the idea of a Senior College (SC) was born. “Fellows” of SC pay \$100 a year (there are now about 100 Fellows) and “Registered Members” pay \$10/year. Membership is open to any post-secondary retiree living in Toronto. They hold weekly meetings at the Faculty club at which a member presents her/his research to other members. SC is financially independent but is recognised by the University of Toronto. It has its administrative office within the Academic Retiree Centre of UofT.

Other programs of SC include creation of a Wiki on the History of the UofT (which now has some 4000 entries), a “Senior Scholars Annual” (which lists the research and publications of all retirees, and is given to senior University administrators each year), and the continuation of the annual all-day Senior Scholars’ Seminar.

Russell noted that there are already a number of Later Life Learning programs for the public in the Toronto area, so SC did not feel it necessary to enter this area.



22 Chase Anderson

After the afternoon Coffee and Tea Break, **Chase Anderson** of Waterloo Insurance spoke briefly about their partnership with CURAC to offer reduced rates on home and auto insurance to members of Associations that are CURAC members. He then distributed door prizes to delegates whose name tags had been drawn by Peter Russell.

Peter Russell then returned to speak on “Seniors as Elders of the Tribe.” He noted that in aboriginal communities, the community decides who is an “elder” by “osmosis”, not by vote. Elders are valued, not for their age, but for

- Knowing what went wrong in the past
- Being able to get to the central point quickly
- Knowing what is fundamental
- Knowing the limits of their own knowledge

Thus, said Russell, retirees should not consider themselves entitled to power, but they do have the power to say what they think without fear of retribution (“What are they going to do—fire me?”).



23 Peter Russell

Tarun Ghose (Dalhousie), a member of the Organizing Committee, said that this Conference had shown again that Regional Conferences are valuable, but he wondered, “What next?” After helping to organize several such conferences, he thought that that an ongoing structure was needed for them to continue. There is a danger in relying on the same volunteers time and time again. He also wondered about the relationship between the Regional and National CURAC Conferences.



24 Tarun Ghose

Randy Barkhouse (President, ADRP) closed the Conference by thanking the speakers, the delegates, and the Organizing Committee for making the day a success. He reminded everyone of the Wine and Cheese Reception to be held at 6:30 pm.



25 Randy Barkhouse



26 CURAC Directors present: Paul Huber (Dalhousie), Ed Williams (Memorial), President George Brandie (Queen's), Howard Fink (Concordia)



27 Relaxing at the Reception

Summary and (most) pictures by George Brandie