

OHIO COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION RETIREES (OCHER) REPORT OF MARCH 23, 2021

Due to the pandemic, this was the first meeting of 2021 and the third meeting held through the Zoom format. Meeting called to order at 9:30 a.m.

The Minutes from November 17, 2020 OCHER meeting via Zoom were approved.

OCHER Treasurer, Jim Lapp (Univ. of Toledo). The current ending balance of the organization is \$6,300.45. The \$500.00 contribution was paid to HPA (Healthcare and Pension Advocates). The OCHER Executive Board is going to discuss collection of dues for 2021-22.

Jerry Newsom (OSU) reported on STRS:

- STRS Board is still meeting virtually.
- July 1, 2020 the funded ratio for STRS was 76.8%, funding period of 14.3 years and a scorecard of -3.
- Restoring the 3% non-compounding COLA would make the scorecard -8 (very bad) and the funding period 60.5 years. A 2% COLA would have a -7 on the scorecard and a funding period of 33.4 years.
- The STRS Board continues to discuss lowering the Rate of Return on Investments. It has been noted that STRS is the only large Ohio retirement plan with the assumed return greater than 7.25% and they need to look at the impact of not meeting that expected return.

Greg Nickell (STRS) 2021 Health Care Update:

Not present; no report given.

Legislative Report (Marla Bump, Director of Government Relations for STRS Ohio)

- Marla said things are pretty quiet at the State right now.
- OSRC (Ohio Retirement Study Council) will be scheduling an actuarial audit and fiduciary audit for STRS. These are required audits of all 5 systems in Ohio. The STRS Director looks forward to these audits. As a new Director he likes the idea of outside experts looking at how STRS does things and welcomes any ideas for improvements.
- Marla felt that COVID had a seamless effect on the workings of STRS. She said they closed one day last March and the next day they were all working from home on laptops, but she is anxious to return to the office.

Legislative Report (Matt Overturf in place of Gordon Gatien, Director of External Relations for OPERS)

- Matt said it is also quiet for OPERS with the General Assembly dealing with COVID and the Annual Budget.
- Matt said OPERS has been in contact with a lot more members virtually than they have in the past with in-person meetings. Easier to sit at your computer than travel to a meeting site.
- OPERS is looking to lower their Rate of Return on Investments. It's currently 7.25%
- The Medicare Healthcare base allowance is decreasing from \$450 to \$350. Members should know what their exact HRA allowance for 2022 will be by 2021 Open Enrollment, if not before then. Matt said about 5 years ago, OPERS noticed that members were carrying balances in their HRA

accounts. Thinking that the allowance was more than what was needed, OPERS decided to make this change in order to extend the life of the Health Care Fund.

- Change of COLA in 2022 still hasn't passed legislation.
- In 2022, Non-Medicare members will receive a monthly healthcare allowance so they can go to the Marketplace and find a plan that fits them. Via Benefits will have a network of plans available. It's called an Open Plan.
- OPERS Board discussing the consolidation of the Combined Plan into the Traditional Plan.
- OPERS Board also looking into the creation of a separate benefit tier for new members hired after a certain date (yet to be determined). This will also require legislative approval.

CAMPUS AND ASSOCIATION REPORTS FROM OCHER MEMBER UNIVERSITIES

- New format for now---each campus represented at the OCHER meeting will state 1 or 2 important facts about their campus and also their retiree association.
- All Universities have announced that plans for Fall 2021 are for in-person classes. Many are also planning in-person commencements in May 2021.

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY-

1. Bad news—the recent hazing incident has had a powerful influence on the campus right now. Dave feels it will affect enrollment. BGSU's Greek system is very strong and the University hates to dissolve it, but they fear there will be severe liabilities and consequences.
2. Decrease in undergraduate enrollment, but increase in graduate enrollment so it's an offset.

Retiree Association:

1. Have had 35-36 members on ZOOM meetings.

OHIO UNIVERSITY

1. Enrollment is down, budget cuts and faculty are up in arms.
2. Men's basketball team had a decent run until Monday, 3/22/21.
3. They have a new marketing campaign, so they are now known as #FOREVEROHIO.

Emeritus Association:

1. Their association meets monthly on ZOOM.
2. Their association funds undergraduate student research awards through the VP of Research Office. They are very proud of this because the university has cut back funding in this area.

MIAMI UNIVERSITY

1. Alumni Association offering many virtual events. They are including the retirees in these events, and it seems to be going very well.
2. Started a vaccination program on campus for faculty and staff that have direct contact with students. No vaccines for students because the semester will end before the 2nd dose needs to be administered.
3. Admission numbers dramatically up; International enrollment is down.
4. They are weathering budget cuts well because they took budget reductions early on.

Retiree Association:

1. No announcement of in-person activities right now, planning one event in the Fall.

CLEVELAND STATE

1. Their President's contract extended thru 2026.

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

1. University started retrenchment process affecting 113 faculty members; 49 in Liberal Arts. Those affected will be offered 18 months of paid notice. University was going to try a retirement process, but this hasn't been successful in the past.
2. First year undergraduate enrollment is down 53% since 2015. University is planning for Fall 2021 to have a decrease of \$12M in tuition and fees. Fall 2021 they are planning enrollment of 10,000; their highest enrollment was 17,000 at one time. (Their reasoning is that before COVID, WSU had serious financial difficulties due to the "crazy" spending of a prior Provost and then COVID exacerbated the problem).

Retiree Association:

1. They are offering virtual lectures for their members.

UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO

1. Their previous Interim President is now the permanent President (18th President). As the Interim, he was able to stabilize the finances of their Medical College so he was commended for this.
2. Experiencing a 10% enrollment decrease.

Retiree Association:

1. Their membership is holding steady at a little over 800 members.
2. They have two Scholarship Funds with a combined balance of just under \$200,000. They awarded \$10,000 in scholarships this past year.
3. Planning on a virtual wine tasting (not sure how this will work out), have done virtual Toledo Zoo and aquarium events on animal behavior.

UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

1. 96 faculty and staff lost their jobs last Fall. No severance pay.
2. Retirees lost 2 benefits—1) retiree/dependent health insurance program; 2) a life insurance policy that was given to retirees was done away with this past December. The University claims they did this because no other Ohio university does it?????
3. Enrollment is less than 20,000; it used to be in the 30,000.
4. University eliminated many academic programs and the OCHER representatives feel like it's a totally different university now

Retiree Association:

1. Membership is down this year.
2. Still having monthly meetings and presentations on ZOOM.

NEOMED

1. Working with State of Ohio and local health boards to serve as a vaccination site.
2. NEOMED's commencement will be held on May 1, 2021 with approximately 250 graduates who will become physicians, pharmacists, medical researchers and other health professionals.

Retiree Association:

1. Meeting via ZOOM to establish scholarship fund guidelines for a disbursement of a scholarship in Fall 2022.
2. Discussing in-person gatherings to start in late summer or fall.
3. Discussing the start of a membership fee for the Retiree Association.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

1. Freshmen ACT scores for the last decade have been going up every year; in Fall 2020 the freshmen enrollment was up sharply, but their ACT scores dropped back to what they were in 2014. No idea the reason for this.

Retiree Association:

1. They have ZOOM lectures once a month and they get better attendance at these than in-person lectures.

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

1. Due to COVID and funding, the University put on hold a redevelopment plan of campus.
2. Plan to have a LIVE commencement in Spring.

Retiree Association:

1. Their monthly meetings are virtual with more people attending from various locations now.
2. Their endowment looks pretty healthy.

MISCELANEOUS ITEMS

Kent State University, Ohio University, The Ohio State University, Ohio Department of Higher Education and the University of Toledo have had class action suits filed against them from students claiming they were not fully refunded tuition and fees after in-person classes were cancelled last Spring due to the pandemic.

OCHER is considering membership in AROHE (Association of Retiree Organizations in Higher Education). The President of OCHER is checking into the cost of membership.

ORTA (Ohio Retiree Teachers Association) is doing a forensic audit on STRS.

University of Akron is the only university with active SERS retirees. Their new retirees are OPERS which means the number of SERS are dwindling, so OCHER has decided a SERS representative is not necessary at our meetings.

Next meeting of OCHER is May 25, 2021 (ZOOM)

Respectively submitted by
Marianne Anderson