

Annual Report

UMRA Communications and Outreach Committee

Covers: July 2021 – June 2022

Report Date: August 31, 2022

To: University of Minnesota Retirees Association

From: Eric Hockert, Committee Chair

Re: Annual Report of the Communications and Outreach Committee

The committee's central **mission** is to raise UMRA's visibility and to make UMRA a recognizable and respected organization within the University community.

The committee's charge as outlined in the UMRA Operating Manual

Major functions: The committee's central mission is to raise UMRA's visibility and to make UMRA a recognizable and respected organization within the University community.

Committee Members: Eric Hockert, Chair; Jean Kinsey, Kris Bettin, Gary Engstrand, Kris Mortensen, John Anderson, Will Craig, Ron Matross, Cathy Lee Gierke, Deanne Magnusson, Ginny Hanson

Activities:

1. Oversees the Newsletter's editorial team and the website team;
2. Solicits and creates articles about the activities of UMRA members;
3. Helps place UMRA-related information on websites and in electronic publications of other U of M units;
4. Supports the Membership Committee in its development and dissemination of the UMRA brochure and in its work with the U of M Office of Human Resources to promote UMRA to prospective retirees;
5. Works with collegiate Resource Responsibility Centers to distribute UMRA information in collegiate publications;

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6. Fosters interaction with U of M organizations such as OLLI, URVC, UMAA, and the U of M Foundation to encourage mention of UMRA in their print and electronic literature.

Results:

1. The UMRA **Newsletter** (Kris Mortensen) continues to produce interesting articles for the UMRA News and eNews such as short interviews with members and feature articles about some members' activities as well as announcements of Forums and Workshops with their subsequent summaries. Paper Newsletters continue to be sent to those who request it.
2. The Newsletter Editor (Kris Mortensen) continued the role of managing the production of several **Zoom events** a month, organizing rehearsals and sending out multiple notices to remind members to register and to tune in. This included the team of Virgil Larsen, John Anderson, and Cathy Lee Gierke.
3. The **Newsletter and the Web site** (<https://umra.umn.edu/>) continue to be the primary means of communication with our members. The newsletter production (8 per year) has been refined and is working well with 2 paid editors (newsletter editor, Kris Mortensen and production editor, Sadie Brendalen). Cathy Lee Gierke has primary responsibility for the UMRA website.
4. The **Website's** content management system is transitioning to the new Drupal 9 platform. The goal is to complete this transition by the end of 2022. Cathy Lee Gierke is leading this effort.
5. Completed a **Guidance** document that served as a tool to summarize the committee's thoughts on directions and actions. This can be considered as a supplement to the committee's Toolkit.
6. The C&O Committee **connects with the Membership Committee** (their chair is a member of the C&O Committee) as there are many mutual efforts and missions. The C&O committee provided input on the invitation letter that is sent to all new retirees.
7. **Liaison** activities included attendance at P&A Senate meetings as well as continued interactions with the Alumni Association. Will Craig represents UMRA to these groups.
8. UMRA **Facebook** group continues to receive content - primarily by UMRA leadership.
9. The **Journal of Opinions, Interests and Essays, JOIE** is active under the guidance of Kris Bettin.

Proposed Future Actions:

1. Increase distribution of **Newsletter** (print format) to university leaders (Deans, unit heads) to expand awareness of UMRA.
2. Create a UMRA **overview slide deck** for use by UMRA leadership and others to increase awareness of UMRA throughout the university e.g. by presentations to departments and at university events.

REPORTS

News Editor

Kristine Mortensen

2021–22 was another unusually active year for the UMRA news editor, who, in addition to being responsible for the monthly (8x/year) *UMRA News* and *eNews* and posting news content on the UMRA website, continued in the role of producer for UMRA’s monthly forums and workshops via Zoom. Both the pre- and post-event Zoom producer responsibilities—scheduling webinars, creating invitation and registration pages, emailing registration reminders via the UMRA Members Listserv, posting slide presentations and Zoom webcasts on the UMRA website—are largely communication tasks and, thus, a logical role for the news editor. UMRA offered 11 forums and 9 workshops via Zoom during our 2021–22 program year. Attendance ranged from 24 to 121 and averaged 45. Our attempt at a hybrid event for UMRA’s 2022 Annual Meeting on May 24 was costly and disappointing, and currently there are no plans to attempt another hybrid event.

Members “opt in” to receive the print newsletter and distribution remained steady over the year; it was 233 (48 couples, 185 singles) in April 2022. The *eNews* is sent to everyone on the UMRA Members Listserv, 709 as of May 2022.

Sponsorship of the UMRA newsletter and forums remained strong, \$6,500 for 2021–22 (up from \$5,500 in 2020–21), due to the excellent work of Bev Moe, UMRA’s sponsorship and discount manager.

Website

Cathy Lee Gierke

Annual Updates

Summer updates are going on now. Every summer I coordinate collection of Annual reports and toolkits, as well as the annual update of all the web pages and web documents.

Web Migration and redesign

The web team has had more than a dozen meetings since the first of the year. We reviewed the site for needed changes, did a study of user-perceived categories, developed a new site organization, designed mockups, and had the mockups reviewed by the C&O committee. We

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are currently in training for new data entry forms, and some of the team is working on building the substructures.

The mockups are done in Lucidpress. We requested reimbursement for the cost of this software subscription, and it was approved.

Member Database updates with Max Fierke

We did three major updates this year, in addition to the normal debug as minor issues are detected.

PayPal: During the May luncheon signup period, some members were unable to pay by credit card. Max suggested to move to Stripe, as the problems appeared to be due to some new PayPal security policies that were not working in our favor. We are now using Stripe.

UMRA has decided to allow luncheon signups to be active all year, instead of just 30 days ahead of the luncheon.

In addition, members will be able to select and pay for multiple luncheons at once, but need not select all upcoming luncheons.

Onboarding new committee members and officers:

Worked with the new Treasurer to let her know what information is available in the member database regarding fees and transactions. Setup access to member database and Square account for her.

Met with the new host committee to train them on tasks related to management of luncheon reservations, cancellation, refunds, etc. Wrote instructions for all member database tasks. Set members up with accounts on member database. Met and stepped through mail-merge process for making labels. [Other](#)

About monthly I export all member database records to Virgil for his use.

Spent some time regaining access to our MySQL database. I lost VPN access, which prevented access to the UMN server that holds our member database. Spent several weeks figuring out how to regain access.

Perform regular maintenance on various UMN accounts used for web, google analytics.

Worked with Eric Hockert to analyze and share Google Analytics with the Web team.

Due to the summer work Max was doing on the member database, we could not use add back in the meal selection feature, needed for the summer social. I developed a separate site to take online purchases. We used this site for last year's summer social as well. It has the advantage of being able to take non-member purchases. This uses Square for payment.

Membership Committee

John S. Anderson

Membership Committee Members: John Anderson, Chair, Joyce Guelich, Ginny Hanson, Nancy Helmich, Leslie Koidal, Virgil Larson, Jan Morlock, Beverly Moe, Jerry Rinehart, John Sullivan, Diane Young

Invitation to Membership: The Communication & Outreach and Membership Committees have an overlapping responsibility to disseminate a message about UMRA/URVC to the University community with special emphasis on newly retired University employees. To this end the committees share consideration of the content of the letter sent each month by the Office of Human Resources (OHR) to the retirees of the previous month inviting them to become members. Two versions of the letter were used since the initial free membership year has a cut-off date of March 1. OHR reported that the letter was sent to 329 new retirees this year.

With the recent modification of the Memorandum of Understanding between UMRA and the Office of the Provost, we will soon provide a slightly modified letter of invitation to be sent to those who retired one and two years ago. This repeat of the invitation is deemed important since many persons are reluctant to make any commitment of their time until they have adjusted to the changes of activity which occur upon retirement.

Number of Members: Virgil Larson, Membership Database Manager, reported on June 23, 2022 that UMRA has 790 members (358 as couples, 432 as singles). Of these 610 were ongoing members and 160 were new members. The membership renewal rate for ongoing members was 87% but for new members was only 53%. For the preceding year the renewal rates were 85 and 64%, respectively.

Outreach: Prior to Covid-19 we staffed a table of information at the annual OHR Pre-retirement seminars. This did not happen this year. However, we did staff a table of information for attendees at the Age Friendly University event on June 20. A similar outreach is scheduled at an assembly of Extension Service retirees on August 11. Materials available included UMRA brochure, the most recent UMRA Newsletter, an information card about UMRA, the URVC Spotlight and some free packets of chocolate to attract viewers.

Committee Meetings: Only one in-person meeting was held this year (June 23) in the backyard of John Anderson's home. Topics discussed included introductions, membership data (see above), the differential dues rate for single members vs. couple membership, and the option of providing 3- and 5-year memberships. For a summary of this meeting please see the attached document.

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Liaison Annual Report

P&A Senate

Will Craig

I attended most meetings of both the P&A Senate and its Consultative Committee. The minutes of those organizations document the issues discussed and actions taken. The P&A Senate meeting minutes and resolutions are filed with UMN Digital Conservancy Archive. In addition, the P&A Consultative Committee files an [annual report](#) with the Board of Regents. Those reports appear each year in the June minutes of the Regents.

The past year I played a small role in helping president Scott Creer develop a document highlighting the roles P&A employees have on the University of Minnesota. I was able to draw the work that UMRA did in preparing its Fact Sheet. Both documents are impressive ways to introduce our organizations to others. Below are some elements of his effort.

- 30% of the instructional and clinical credits are delivered by P&A employees each semester, systemwide.
- Over \$110 million of sponsored projects were led by P&A employees each year in FY21 and FY22.
- 20% of all sponsored projects list P&A employees as key personnel.
- 22% of all University scholarly publications list a P&A employees as the main or contributing author.

Alumni Association

Will Craig

UMRA and the UofM Alumni Association (UMAA) have been working closely together since a Partnership Agreement was signed in summer 2020.

The following numbers document the success of that relationship:

- 12 tickets sold for UofM Day at Target Field baseball game
- 44 videos submitted to Gold Mind in the past 2 years – 18 this year
 - 1,616 views in 2 years – 1,175 this past year
 - 186 views of *Scanning Family Photos* (12/21), our most popular program
- 33 people signed up for Day of Service in April
 - 5 UMRA members
 - 25 URVC volunteers
 - 3 with both UMRA & URVC affiliations

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It is time to renew that Partnership Agreement. We are on a 2-year renewal cycle, focused on September of even-number years. I have contacted Steve Davis at UMAA to start the renewal process, copying UMRA president and president elect. Steve is their Associate Vice President of Engagement and our primary contact there. Getting that agreement extended is my primary work for the summer.

Journal of Opinions, Ideas & Essays (JOIE)

Kris Bettin, Editor-in-chief

In early 2021, The *Journal of Opinions, Ideas & Essays* (JOIE) was reactivated as the open-access online journal sponsored by the University of Minnesota Retirees Association (UMRA). Under the guidance of the new editor-in-chief, Kris Bettin, and an editorial committee of six UMRA members, JOIE now offers readers 31 articles on a wide variety of subjects, from reports on University endeavors to interesting campus photos, American history to gardening, and literature analysis to faculty tributes. Authorship is open to everyone in the University community; news articles aimed at recruiting authors for JOIE have focused, so far, on campus publications (e.g., *UMRA Newsletter*, *Brief* and *P&A Newsletter*), with a small number of responses and promised papers. Most of the new JOIE articles were solicited via word-of-mouth, which hopefully will continue, but increased visibility for the journal is needed.

JOIE readership remains strong. There are currently approximately 300 downloads per month and one article has been downloaded over 9,000 times since 2014. User statistics seem to indicate that most readers are bypassing the JOIE homepage, likely finding articles via web searches, a fact to keep in mind for future journal development.

The homepage for JOIE, under the University Digital Conservancy (UDC), has been updated to improve usability and a “Submissions Guidelines” for authors added. A Facebook page for JOIE was created early this year (<https://www.facebook.com/JournalofOpinionsIdeasandEssays>), designed to periodically highlight selected articles.

The continuity of JOIE has been ensured by creation of operating manuals stored in the “Committee Archives” within the UMRA website, and by storage of all journal-related documents in a newly-created Google documents site.

Guidance Outline

Background

UMRA's Mission: To promote the interests of University of Minnesota retirees and to provide opportunities to learn, serve and connect. - Ron Matross (Program Chair and Incoming President)

C&O Role: Works to publicize and promote UMRA activities to the membership, the University, and the broader community.

President's charge - "How we, UMRA, are presenting ourselves to potential members and the public" Jan Morlock (UMRA President)

These opportunities include:

- Monthly luncheon forums featuring a wide variety of topics and speakers
- Monthly workshops on topics relating to living well as we age
- Social events, including recreational activities and group travel
- Member-initiated special interest groups
- Representation of the interests of retirees to University committees and administration
- The Professional Development Grants for Retirees program supporting University retirees' research and professional development
- The *Journal of Opinions, Ideas, and Essays* publishing diverse articles by retired or active faculty, staff, and alumni from the five campuses in the University of Minnesota System
- Remembrances and memorials for deceased retirees
- Engagement in service projects at the University and in the community through the University Retirees Volunteer Center

Topics and Guidance

1. Why do we want to communicate
 - a. Raise awareness of UMRA
 - i. Build respect for UMRA
 - ii. Build respect for UMRA as a voice that supports the university
 - b. Show value to UMN
 - i. UMRA and URVC are potential resources to the university and community

- ii. Members provide substantial donations to the university through the Foundation.
 - c. Entice new members to join
 - d. Maintain UMN support of UMRA
 - e. Want others to listen to UMRA's views
 - f. Inform UMRA members of activities and ways to get involved
 - g. Want to show members how to volunteer to support the university's mission.
2. Audience
- a. UMRA members
 - b. Potential members
 - c. Faculty and staff
 - d. UMN administration and leadership
 - e. U Relations (funds URVC and is U's communicator)
 - f. Office of Human Resources (OHR)
 - g. Department and service unit heads
 - h. UMN Foundation and Development Officers (collegiate, department, unit levels)
 - i. General public
 - j. Students?
 - k. Invited speakers?
3. Content of communications
- a. Want a consistent message across all platforms and to all audiences and through all communication channels
 - b. UMRA activities e.g. Forums, Workshops, new member invitations, social events, special interest groups, PDGR, JOIE, remembrances for deceased members, service opportunities (URVC).
 - c. Speakers's info, follow-up articles to their presentations
 - d. UMRA/URVC connection (merger?) if decide to go forward with this
 - e. Convince potential members to join
 - f. Message that UMRA has value to UMN and to the public/state
 - g. Liaison and representative's reports for Newsletter consideration (e.g. UMAA, AROHE, Regents, ...)
 - h. UMRA Annual Report to be shared with members and with upper administration e.g. Provost and President.
 - i. It was also suggested that we identify top UMRA news items to post for the UMRA FB group.
4. Communication channels - Kris Bettin's list she created for JOIE purposes.
- a. Note the items highlighted in bold in the table below. These are the ones considered to be our primary communication channels. We limited the number of them in consideration of sustainability i.e. how many can we actually use with the resources/people we currently have.

a) UMRA Newsletter	Kris Mortensen akm@umn.edu
b) <i>JOIE</i> News UMRA homepage	
c) UMRA “News” on website	
d) UMRA Luncheon Forums – twice annually	Jan Morlock, Pres
e) UMRA Facebook page	
f) UMRA new members events	John Anderson (Chair, Membership Comm)
g) UMRA book club and photo club to encourage submissions: editor-in-chief meet once per year with groups	
h) Facebook page for <i>JOIE</i> – create one?	Eric Hockert (Comm Committee Chair)/Jan Morlock (Pres-elect)
i) How to connect with all UMN retirees? (UMRA has email list of retirees but it has restrictions and can be used once annually)	
j) OLLI website: Add <i>JOIE</i> description to UMRA description	
k) U of M Alumni Association website	
l) <i>Minnesota Alumni</i> (print, UMAA, Alumni News & Events)	UMNalumnimag@umn.edu
m) <i>Alumni Angle</i> (online, UMAA)	umalumni@umn.edu
n) UMN clubs: book clubs, writers’ club, poetry club, etc	
o) <i>URVC Snapshot</i> (University Retirees Volunteer Center)	urvc@umn.edu
p) UMN Women’s Club	They share UMRA office in McNamara
q) UMN graduate schools, undergrad programs in writing	CLA Creative Writing Program
r) Brief (UMN e-news)	brief@umn.edu
s) Minnesota Daily (UMN print news)	
t) <i>Legacy Magazine</i> (UMN Foundation donor e-news)	
u) <i>P&A Senate Newsletter</i> (P&A employees, e-news/blog)	Tracy Hammel
v) Post notice in UMN retirement communities’ common areas	1. 1666 Coffman 2. Pillars of Prospect Park
w) other UMN newsletters	

Add other UMRA/URVC representatives and liaisons as communication channels through relationships with their respective organizations e.g. Senate, Alumni Association, ...

Suggested additional channels

- **Direct emails** to UMRA members
- **Department/unit visits** – in-person with department heads to share the UMRA story for their potential new retirees and to identify potential new volunteer project opportunities within their departments/units.
- **Invitation letter** from the UMRA Membership committee that's sent to new retirees through UMN HR.
- Discussion about using the UMRA Facebook (FB) group. Desire to keep it dynamic with active postings by a variety of UMRA people. For example, could include SIG updates and events. Eric looked at the UMRA FB page and it looks like we can individually post on that page and it shows only to group (UMRA) members. We should also post UMRA news items to the UMRA FB page.

5. Current communications

- a. Newsletter/eNews
- b. Website
- c. Direct emails e.g. Forums, Workshops, Membership committee's mailings to potential members through OHR
- d. Facebook
- e. Gold Mind – UMAA