**Benefits Committee Report to the Executive Board for May 2021**

**By Carol Newcomb-Alutto and Marie Taris**

**FCBC -** Hal Moellering reported on the zoom meeting of April 21 which included continuing discussions of their final report to the administration and of the University’s Composition Philosophy statement. They also brainstormed ideas about what additional benefits might be desirable for faculty. Hal suggested they explore incentives to encourage use of the OSU Faculty Club.

Discussion in the Benefits Committee that followed showed interest in exploring ways to encourage members of OSURA to use the Faculty Club. We decided to investigate current policies of the Faculty Club (membership levels, service fees for non-members, potential reciprocity with other groups, etc.) Nancy mentioned the previous article she wrote on this topic and will send it to all of us. Several committee volunteers agreed to reach out to the manager of the Club and report back in June

**OPERS -** Bev Maselli’s report included information about access to 2020 tax forms, but concerns were expressed that more detailed news and data would be desirable. It was acknowledged that it traditionally has been difficult to secure reports and handouts from OPERS’ Board meetings, especially compared to what we can obtain from STRS

**STRS/HPA and Legislative Update -** Jerry Newsom reported that May 3 was the deadline for voting for STRS Board members and suggested it will be interesting to see how successful the 2 retiree challengers, who have different views than incumbents, will be. They both campaigned on reinstituting the COLA and reducing STRS staff. There was a presentation to the Board reminding board members that they must act as fiduciaries and represent both retirees and current working members.

Retiree applications for public school teachers in Ohio are up sharply, on pace to have 4000 retirements this year, compared to 2700 in FY 2020 and 3100 in FY 2019.

The STRS Board news included information about the Board’s investment decision responsibilities and framework, recognizing that different asset classes have different return and risk potential. The current financial outlook as presented at the Board looks upbeat.

Bonuses for the Board’s investment managers has been a lively topic among those criticizing the STRS Board, pushing the notion that the bonus money would be better spent on pensions. But the data show that bonus amounts are absolutely trivial compared to pension payments.

Criticisms of public defined benefit plans suggest they are in terrible shape but the data from across the country paint a different picture. However, some states have pension problems and Jerry shared information from several states and their efforts to improve the pension systems. AARP reports millions of older employees were forced to take retirement earlier than they’d planned because of the pandemic, especially low-income and minorities. The number of retiring Americans who won’t be able to maintain their pre-retirement standard of living has gone up from 50% previously to 55% now. Downward mobility is in the cards for many.

**OCHER** – Nancy Wardwell reported that OCHER is working on nominations for next year but she thinks the board composition will probably remain the same.

**Elder Care** – Meg Teaford shared that the subcommittee on Health and Wellness held their 3rd zoom on April 17th which focused on COVID. Fifty-five signed up and about 33-35 actually viewed the session and the evaluations were positive.

Meg’s written report provided highlights of a recent telephone survey of adults age 50 and older indicating that attitudes and use of technology have become more positive during Covid 19. Forty-four percent report more positive feelings about using technology than a year ago. They reported increased use of technology for video chatting, social media, smart phone, telehealth visits, grocery shopping, ordering prescriptions, viewing programs on streaming services, etc. Many respondents reported that they have updated their devices including phones and TV’s. One of the major barriers is cost or lack or high speed internet. Respondents also expressed a great interest in learning how to use more technology. That point spun off a conversation about what OSURA might do to assist our members with technology challenges. It was suggested by Marie and Joan that we might offer sessions on technical issues including demonstrations on the features of smart phones and TVs. The group agreed that it would be useful to provide tech information for OSURA members. It was suggested that we approach the Alumni Association to work with us on this. Nancy suggests getting a core of OSURA members to volunteer to help others on a one to one basis and maybe even do home visits.

**Financial Matters** – Doug Jones provided another information packed report. He noted under his **Facts and Stats** that the GDP grew at a 6.4% rate January through March. The 4th Quarter 2020 rate was 4.0%.  Employment numbers advanced nicely and new weekly unemployment rates dropped considerably.  The Federal Reserve believes that the labor market has a long road back, and worries little about inflation, expecting to hold interest rates low until late 2023.

On the tax front, there are complaints about slowness and ineptitude at IRS operations abound as the agency struggles with backlogs in paper transactions, COVID induced responsibilities for Stimulus checks, Rescue checks, expanded Child tax credits, and increased fraud attacks.  Two major considerations for all this would seem to be (1) that IRS was actually created as a tax administrator and not a social programs instrument, and (2) markedly reduced funding and staffing along with outdated technology and infrastructure are a large part of the problem.

Under the topic of **FINDINGS** Doug reported that a national moving company analysis found that Idaho, South Carolina, and Oregon experienced the largest percentage of in *inbound* moves last year, and New Jersey, New York, and Illinois experienced the largest percentage of *outbound* moves. Interestingly this correlated with the level of tax rates in each set of states—lowest in the first and highest in the second.

**Fall Conference –**Sally Dellinger said they are now working on getting speaker bio’s and presentation summary. They are also working with Fawcett on Covid-related issues. Meg has done a great job in finally getting OSU President to agree to do a recorded welcome for the conference.

**SRA Working Group** – Hal Moellering’s handout indicated that the group is still analyzing the OSU/HR retirement plan updates and monitoring the ROC actions relative to the OSURA recommendations. They also are reviewing the OSU/HR recent Investment Policy Statement on Defined Contribution Retirement Plans.

It was reported that the **OSURA Annual Meeting** is scheduled for June 30th and Gemma McLuckie, who will be president at that time, will organize and chair the meeting.