A Brief History of the UWRA/UW Relationship

The University of Washington Retirement Association (UWRA) is a non-profit organization composed of and funded by dues-paying members. Most members are retired staff and faculty of the University of Washington, although active UW staff and former employees and retirees of other institutions of higher education may also qualify for membership.

The UWRA was established in 1975 as a consequence of a concerted and prolonged effort by active and retired UW employees to secure a more reliable retirement benefits package. The UWRA is probably the oldest and is one of the largest higher education retirement associations. It serves its membership and the UW through advancement of retiree interests, educational programs, service projects, interest groups and social events.

From 1978 to 2009 the office of the UWRA was located in the UW Retirement Center in Room 76 of Gerberding Hall on the UW Seattle campus.

The University of Washington Retirement Center operated for over 30 years under the auspices of the Office of the Provost. The center served all retirees of the UW as well as current UW employees as a campus resource for information, consultation and referral on issues such as eldercare, retirement transitions and UW retiree privileges. Through the Retirement Center the UW provided office and meeting space and infrastructure support for the work of the UWRA.

Staffing needs of the UWRA and the Retirement Center were met by the Director and the Program Operations Specialist, as well as a group of UWRA office volunteers. Until 2009 the UW and the UWRA jointly funded the UW staff positions.

In the course of dealing with the economic downturn that began in 2008, the Provost ended UW funding and salary support for the UW Retirement Center.

During 2009-2010 the UWRA entered negotiations with University Advancement to achieve the goals of continued official connection to the UW. UWRA sought office space on campus and continued paid UW staffing. Strongly overlapping missions to keep UW community members, including retirees, in relationship with the university provided the foundation for a negotiated, formal Memorandum of Understanding, finalized in June 2010. University Advancement secured UA-designated office space in B80 Gerberding Hall for the new University Retiree Relations office, also housing the UWRA. The UWRA re-configured finances to fund two half-time UW employees. Shared projects and programs for UW retirees and older adults found support through University Advancement.

Through this new affiliation the future holds change, challenge and enhanced opportunities for the UWRA.
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The UWRA has affiliated with ERA Living, Inc., a for-profit developer. Together they have created and monitor the services and programming at two retirement communities, University House at Wallingford, which opened in 1997, and University House at Issaquah, which opened in 2002.

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The University of Washington Retirement Center, 1978-2009, has operated under the auspices of the Office of the Provost. The center has served all retirees of the UW, as well as current UW employees. It has been a campus resource for information, consultation and referral on issues such as eldercare, retirement transitions and UW retiree privileges.

Through the Retirement Center the UW also provided office and meeting space as well as infrastructure support for the work of the UWRA.

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The UW Benefits Office handles the formal and financial details of UW benefits and retirement arrangements. The Benefits Office staff provides employees and retirees with a full range of related services, including counseling, interpretation of benefits, procedures and claims, information on tax deferment and dependent care programs, death and disability counseling and claims administration, benefit-related retirement seminars and educational materials.