

Position Guide: UMRA Secretary

Last Updated: October 1, 2020

All UMRA officers, committee chairs, etc., learn things during the year that they wish they had known earlier. “Position Guides” like this are designed to make some of that learning available to their successors. The first edition of this position guide for the Secretary position was prepared in summer 2016. Annually secretaries should expand, correct, and update it as.

Part I: Responsibilities

According to the 2018–19 Operating Manual, the Secretary:

- Serves on the Board of Directors and Executive Committee.
- Takes minutes at all meetings of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee, as well as the annual meeting of the membership in May and any additional Association meetings. Notes “Approval Pending” or “Approved” on each set of minutes. Note on each set of minutes, “Minutes prepared by . . . “
- Prepares minutes and sends them to the President to review and then circulate to the Executive Committee and, in the case of Board or Association minutes, to the Board as well.
- Sends Executive Committee, Board, and Annual Meeting minutes to the UMRA webmaster for posting on the UMRA website.
- Based on decisions in the Executive Committee, the secretary writes up proposed Bylaw changes and sends to President for inclusion in Executive Committee and Board mailings and ultimately for Association action; posts revised Bylaws on UMRA website.
- All information (except paper) is submitted to the webmaster during annual document collection in the summer. The UMRA Historian can get her info from the website if there is anything else she needs.

Part II: Activities

Term: The position is re-elected annually, so it goes essentially year-to-year. It takes about a year to get completely acclimated, however, so most occupants of the position will probably want to serve at least two years, if possible. The Secretary is a full member of the Executive Committee and Board, not “just” the person recording what goes on in meetings (which doesn't always happen in other organizations), and you will find your participation in the meetings highly valued by their members.

Time commitment: On average you will probably spend three or four hours a month writing up two sets of minutes: Board and Executive Committee. (In May there's a third set, for the annual Association meeting.) Attendance at meetings of both bodies consumes another four hours or so—perhaps six to eight once you add transportation time and time reading background materials. Other tasks, including email communication, probably take another two to four hours a month. So perhaps the total workload comes to about twelve to fourteen hours per month—and less in summer.

Meetings: The Executive Committee usually meets on Tuesday one week before each Board meeting. Meeting locations and exact times vary and have recently been via Zoom. The Board meets in Coffman immediately before the monthly luncheon or via Zoom. The annual Association meeting takes place as part of the May luncheon or via Zoom. (Usually its only real business is election of Board and officers; occasionally a Bylaws amendment is on the agenda as well.) Executive Committee meetings usually take an hour to an hour and a half; Board meetings take an hour and a half to an hour and forty-five minutes.

Writing up and revising the minutes afterward: If possible, draft minutes within a few days after a meeting, then send them to the President requesting that the President send them back with any comments or corrections. After incorporating these, send the corrected version back to the President for inclusion among the attachments to the following month's emailing to the Executive Committee. Further revisions (usually minor) follow the Executive Committee meeting. The President then includes the revised draft of the Board minutes in the mailing for the Board meeting.

Getting minutes to the UMRA Website: After the Executive Committee and Board have given their final approval to each set of minutes, send the Executive Committee and Board minutes—and, in May, the Association minutes—to the webmaster for posting on the website. Note on each set “Approved.”

Covering for secretary absences: Although officers are expected to attend all Executive Committee, Board, and Annual meetings when feasible, absences because of travel, illness, or unavoidable conflicts sometimes occur. As soon as you know you will need to miss a meeting, notify the President and seek someone who can fill in for you. Among the more promising candidates might be a past Secretary.

Archiving responsibilities: Each year the History Committee gathers UMRA materials together to store in the University Archives. The chair of that committee, currently Gloria Williams, receives those documents from the webmaster. So, by early fall (most typically by the September Board meeting) the secretary is responsible for passing on the following for the year just concluding to the webmaster:

- Executive Committee minutes (sent monthly)
- Board minutes (sent monthly)
- Association minutes (sent annually)
- Updated version of this position guide (sent annually)

Appendix: Tips from Former Secretaries

The following tips are ideas/systems that worked well for their authors. They represent personal preferences which some future presidents might find helpful and others not. Unlike the preceding sections, they are not designed to be updated annually but simply to stay as part of the document, to be used if helpful, ignored if not, deleted if subsequent change renders them irrelevant.

Appendix 1: Tips for Taking Minutes (Chip Peterson, Secretary 2015–2016)

I tried taking minutes on my laptop once, but I found it the necessary cursor movement awkward (for example, going back up to record a late arrival after the meeting had begun). After that experiment I always took notes by hand. To make it easier, however, after Jean (Kinsey, that year's UMRA president) sent out the agenda I prepared a sheet in the format I would ultimately use for the minutes, estimated how much discussion there was likely to be on each item, spaced accordingly after each heading, and ran off the result to use for taking notes during the meeting. Because of all the blank space I left for each item, often the worksheet came to four or five pages. I used only one side when I printed so that would be able to turn it over and continue on the back if it turned out I had underestimated how much discussion a particular item would generate. The black print in the following example shows what that sheet looked like when I arrived for the meeting; the red print adds annotations for this guide.

UMRA Board of Directors
Minutes Meeting of Tuesday, April 28, 2020
[Considered unofficial pending Board approval]

Members present: Carl Adams, Shirley Barber, Steve Benson, Roger Clemence, Joanne Eicher, Vern Eidman, John Howe, Jean Kinsey, Virgil Larson, Jeanne Markell, Sheri Goldsmith May, Hal Miller, Dave Naumann, Kathy O'Brien, Chip Peterson, Donna Peterson, Gloria Williams
[This was the complete Board list for the year. I just circled names as people arrived for the meeting., then moved the un-circled names down into the "Members absent" section when I wrote up the minutes.]

Members absent:

Other participants: John Anderson, Bud Clawson, Ginny Hanson, Jan Hogan, Dale Swanson
[These were non-members who sometimes attended. I circled of those who did, added names of any other visitors not on this brief list, then removed the others when writing up minutes.]

Kinsey called the meeting to order at _____ a.m.

1. Welcome

Kinsey welcomed all.

2. Agenda

The Board adopted the agenda as previously distributed by email. [That's what usually happened; if not, I crossed out this line, took notes, and later changed the typed text.]

3. Minutes

The Board approved the previously distributed minutes of its April 26 meeting with no changes. [If there were changes I just revised this afterward.]

4. Treasurer's Report

[For a fairly routine item like this that I suspected would generate little discussion, I would often leave just a few blank lines for note-taking.]

5. Update and draft MOU between UMRA and the U of M

[For an item like this, which concerned a memorandum of agreement with the Provost's office and seemed likely to generate much more discussion, I would sometimes leave as much as half a page for note-taking.]

Committee reports

10. Nominations Committee

[Etc. through last item]

The meeting adjourned at a.m.

Notes from Lynn C. Anderson, Secretary, 2018-2020

I took notes on the agenda and attachments provided for each meeting and wrote up the minutes on the computer, usually that same day. Minutes must contain "Minutes submitted by" and either "Approval Pending" or "Approved."

I found it helpful early on (as I was learning everyone's names) to have a list of Board members with a check box for "attended" and circulated that during the meeting.