

University Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 3, 2014
12:15 p.m.
President's Board Room, 210 Burruss Hall

Present: Dan Taylor (chair), Janice Austin, Jan Helge Bøhn, Luke Carroll, Candi Clemenz, Terry Cobb, Carrie Cox, Jean-Luc Ford, Rebecca Funk, Larry Hincker, Eric Winger, Pengtao Yue

Absent Joe Merola, Joseph Millett, Jacqueline Nottingham (with notice), Kim O'Rourke (with notice), Elena Serrano, Anthony Watson, Diane Zahm (with notice)

Guests: Bo Frazier, Captain Vince Houston, Margie Murray, April Myers, Andrew Putnam, Pam Vickers, Laura Wedin

Dr. Taylor called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m.

Announcement of Approval of May 7, 2014, minutes

Taylor announced that the minutes of May 7, 2014, have been voted on and approved electronically.

Debriefing of Spring Ceremonies

Taylor indicated that there may be a need to start the University ceremony about 10 minutes earlier in order for the ceremony to begin as scheduled. The procession did not end until 9:12 a.m. and should have ended at 9:00 a.m.

Taylor recommended checking with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (VDOT) every year to make sure that there are no situations that can cause delays. Captain Houston indicated that the Virginia Tech Police Department (VTPD) will handle contacting VDOT.

Frazier indicated that there were issues with the flow of traffic due to both University ceremony guests and employees trying to enter campus at the same time. A suggestion was made to have essential employees arrive early and delay opening the university for two hours for the non-essential employees to help avoid potential traffic jams. A suggestion was also made to utilize VDOT and the Town of Blacksburg electronic signs to give some direction for Commencement traffic. Hincker made a recommendation to send out a campus notice in the Virginia Tech daily news e-mail regarding the traffic patterns to use the day of Commencement. This information can be included on the Commencement and Parking and Transportation websites. Bøhn asked how much time it takes for Commencement guests to get from the Southgate Drive entrance to the stadium. Wedin indicated that it took her 30 minutes to get from the Hotlzman Alumni Center to the stadium. Bøhn suggested that Commencement guests park on the other side of campus and walk to the stadium. It will take less time for guests to walk to the stadium then to get to a parking space closer to the stadium. Guests can park in the Perry Street parking garage at no charge or they can park in the North End Center parking garage for a fee. Captain Houston also suggested we make use of the Duck Pond and Cage parking lots. A recommendation was also made to inform guests to arrive 45 minutes prior to the start of the ceremony.

Austin indicated that there were issues with traffic because the Graduate School ceremony guests were trying to enter parking lots on campus while the University ceremony guests were trying to exit the parking lots on campus.

Vickers also indicated that there was a lot of pedestrian congestion at the exit from the stadium nearest the coliseum. Houston suggested that we should encourage pedestrians to use Spring Road because it will be closed to vehicles.

Vickers indicated that she received complaints about guests for the Graduate School ceremony not being able to enter Cassell Coliseum until 30 minutes prior to the start of the ceremony. A suggestion was made to have Cassell Coliseum open once everything is set-up for the Graduate School ceremony. Murray indicated that it was noted in the brochure that guests would be allowed to enter venues an hour before the start of each ceremony. Captain Houston stated due to the use of RMC personnel, we may be able to open Cassell at 10:00 a.m. RMC uses the same staff at both the University and the Graduate School ceremonies. Houston will speak with RMC and see if something can be worked out.

Bøhn mentioned that it would be a good idea to have specified entrances and exits (marked with signage) in Cassell to help with getting people in and out of the coliseum. Captain Houston indicated that having specified entrances and exits will more than likely create a backup when the majority of guests are trying to enter the coliseum. Captain Houston indicated that he will work on getting personnel to direct guests as to where to go.

Cobb requested that the usher and marshal volunteers receive instructions sooner. This past spring, the volunteers received this information really close to the ceremony. Taylor suggested that a preliminary contact can go out thanking the volunteers for their service, and the initial contact can inform each volunteer that he or she will receive more detailed instructions at a later date. All of the volunteer names from all colleges need to be received before assignments can be made. Not all colleges get volunteer names in as quickly as other colleges do.

Hincker asked if there was any feedback from families or students on the new start times of the ceremonies. Taylor indicated that he had not received any feedback about the new start times.

Vickers informed the committee that she had a complaint that a Ph.D. student needed to take the elevator from the line-up location instead of the stairs. A suggestion was made to allow those students who have special needs to wait at the entrance to the coliseum floor and fall in line as the procession goes by.

Campus housing seems to be working well for Commencement guests. Murray indicated that she was informed that some of the area hotels are going to allow reservations to be made earlier than March.

Austin indicated that a question was raised in the Graduate School about getting special regalia for the Board of Visitors members participating at the Commencement ceremonies. Myers indicated that the Academic Costume Code from the American Council on Education indicates that the governing body of a college or university are permitted to wear doctor's gowns whatever their degrees. Bøhn indicated that other universities have special regalia for their board members in order to distinguish the board members from others on the stage. Hincker indicated that it would be a significant expense to provide custom made regalia for the 14 members of the Board of Visitors.

Murray questioned whether the Graduate School would be willing to provide a partial program for the audience instead of the full program. Murray stated that there are lots of programs not used. A partial program does not have the names of the students. Currently, the partial program is given to the audience at the University ceremony. Bøhn indicated that the important part of the program is the list of graduates' names. A suggestion was made to mail out programs to the graduates' home address. Hincker indicated that the issue is getting a good

address to mail them to. A suggestion was made to have an opt-in procedure in order to receive the program. A card could be filled out with correct addresses to mail them to. Austin indicated that she would check with the Graduate School leadership about providing the full versus partial programs at their ceremony.¹

Clemenz informed the committee that numerous graduates were pausing on stage to take a photograph of themselves (“selfies”) as they received their degree during the Pamplin College of Business ceremony. There may need to be a policy indicating that graduates cannot take “selfies” while on the stage receiving their diplomas.

Introductions

Introductions were made so that everyone could become familiar with each other.

Planning for Fall ceremonies

As of this time, there was nothing to report about planning for the fall ceremonies.

Announcement

Taylor announced that the October 1, 2014, meeting may be cancelled. This will be confirmed later this month.

With no other business, Cobb moved to adjourn at 1:03 p.m.

¹ On 9/16/2014 Austin reported the following response from the graduate school: “We agree to change from the full bulletin for the audience to the shortened program like the one distributed at the University ceremony while still providing a full bulletin for all participating graduates and their hooding faculty seated on the floor of the coliseum. Our Northern Virginia campus would still like to have full programs for all their students and audience.”