

University Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes

October 4, 2023

12:00PM

Zoom

Attending: Diane Zahm, Monecia Taylor, Pascha Gerni, Kim O'Rourke, Janice Austin, Anthony Watson, Joe Merola, Stewart Scales, Keith Thompson, Jodie Brinkmann, Jenn Thomas, Vito Scarola, Jennifer Cleveland, Monica Kimbrell, Colin Roberts.

Invited Guest: Jessie Richards, Deanna Harman, Milford Palmer, Pamela Vickers, Eryn Peters, Zach Roland, Barbara Hoopes, Abby Carlson, Natasha Smith, Colin Roberts

Diane Zahm called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m.

Introduction of Members

All members of the committee were asked to introduce themselves and the department, college, or stakeholder they represented. All guests at the meeting introduced themselves and their purpose for attending the committee meetings.

Committee Member Responsibilities

Every person on the committee does have a responsibility. Most are in relation to implementing the ceremonies. College representative responsibility is to recruit volunteers to work as marshals during the ceremonies. The charge of the committee for the next several months will be to organize marshals for commencement in December.

Fall Commencement

Fall Commencement ceremonies will be held on Friday, December 15. The undergraduate student ceremony will be held at 10:30 a.m. and the graduate school ceremony will be at 2:30 p.m. Both ceremonies will be held in Cassell Coliseum. There are no college ceremonies held in the fall.

DC area ceremony will send an email to their students regarding graduates welcome to attend Blacksburg for the fall ceremony and will have a reception their graduates can attend. Their faculty are welcome to attend Blacksburg as volunteers or sit on the floor during commencement.

Volunteer Needs

A call for volunteers marshals will be sent from the committee chair in the coming weeks. College representatives were reminded some college's have specific order to which faculty are volunteered and should follow internal process for collection of names.

For the Fall Commencement two volunteers will be needed at both the University Ceremony and the Graduate School Ceremony. They can be the same volunteers. One of the volunteers is required to wear regalia. Volunteers can be faculty or staff. Graduate students have been volunteers without regalia in previous years.

College of medicine, has own ceremony and for the fall do not need to collect marshals.

Faculty from all colleges are invited to attend as marshals or sit on the floor during Fall Commencement Ceremony.

Commencement Speakers

A list of possible University Commencement speakers are being reviewed. Once the list is narrowed down the names will be sent to the President's Office for final selection.

Students speakers for the University Commencement will be selected and announced at the meeting next month.

The Graduate School will have three students give 90 second nutshell speeches. A process is in place for selection.

Spring Commencement Debrief

A summary of debrief notes gathered from committee, college ceremony coordinators, Dean's, and university stakeholders from the spring was given to the committee and added to the meeting minutes in Appendix A.

Additional items that will be addressed for the coming spring ceremonies include how to address several colleges needing additional ceremonies and wanting smaller locations. A new schedule is being created to address this issue. The committee and Dean's will need to be prepared regarding the university reaching breaking point. Next is to go to graduation week that is not affordable for families.

Kim O'Rourke brought forth some feedback she had received from families. Families would like more pomp and circumstance brought back to the ceremonies. Some families would like to have student procession or all students to come in together at one time. Wanting more time of stage party walking through the students and end zone. Families have missed the physical programs we used to do and would like the QR code or program sent ahead of time for them to print and bring with them.

Adjournment

With no further committee business, the meeting adjourned at 12:31 p.m.

Future Meeting Dates

November 1st at Noon.

Appendix A

Communication:

Clear prohibited list, including strollers, diaper bags, and large signs. Clear communication regarding where ADA is at the Stands. Communication encouraging guests to arrive earlier for University ceremony. More communications directed to parents or create a one page information sheet for them. More communication regarding sealed water bottles allowed on field. More clear bag policy signs.

Parking:

Not enough time to clear lots between ceremonies, especially Saturday, College of Engineering. Offer shuttle and ADA shuttle services like football games. Friday morning major backup onto 460 had to delay ceremony as guests were directed to park in cage lots and further away as nearby was filled well before ceremony. Need to communicate when lots are full and to redirect people to other lots. The reserved Lot 4 for stage party and staff needs to be released earlier for guest use.

University Ceremony:

Need to offer shuttle services like football. Work with town regarding trash pickup not to be the same time as ceremony. Stage party indicated would like alma mater removed from ceremony.

Schedule:

A second Graduate School Ceremony is needed for PhD. A second ceremony is needed for College of Science. A third or fourth ceremony will be needed for College of Engineering to fit inside rain location, Cassell.

Other:

Add a lactation room.

Move camera platform closer.

Set times for weather meetings with Deans and coordinators.

Stanchions or more volunteers to funnel students back to seats.

Add student sign-up for attending college ceremonies.

Display student information slide as each student crosses the stage.

Electronic name reading to speed up the process.

Move location of off stage photograph away from Section 8 as created a bottleneck of parents trying to take photos at that corner. Could this be tented.

More bottle water for students.

Guests and students leaving after name reading. Will need to address to encourage both groups to stay. It is a universal problem that students and guests leaving early.