

University Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes

February 7, 2024

12:00PM

Zoom

Attending: Diane Zahm (chair), Jacob Neice, Joe Merola, Stewart Scales, Anthony Watson, Keith Thompson, Jodie Brinkmann, Vito Scarola, Pascha Gerni, Margaret Deck, Janice Austin, Kim O'Rourke, Marlena Lester, Monica Kimbrell

Invited Guests: Zane Edmonds, Milford Palmer, Elvis Rosario, Zach Roland, Barbara Hoopes, Chris Bolling, Annie McCallum, John Jackson, Eryn Peters, Ciji Good, Becca Emery

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

Fall Commencement Debrief:

A call was issued for feedback regarding the Fall Commencement ceremony. It was suggested the University Marshal be invited to attend a practice for master students. The University Marshal is invited to a rehearsal; however, students are not in attendance. Additional feedback was given of marking spots on the floor where students should stand or have a marshal at the top of the stairs to move them smoothly and quickly. Members were asked to send anything further to Diane Zahm or Deanna Harman.

College Representative Role:

A reminder was given to College Representatives regarding their role compared to the College Ceremony Coordinators. College Representatives are part of the Commencement Committee and are asked to submit the names of the marshals their college will provide for University ceremonies. Members were reminded no meeting is held in March due to Spring Break.

Spring Commencement Schedule:

The Spring Commencement Schedule was published to the public in January. It was designed to accommodate the requests of university leadership, specifically requests by Deans to address needs of individual colleges. The graduate school ceremony will only be for PhD, EDD, and interdisciplinary masters. All other master students will be recognized within their individual college ceremonies and are invited to University Ceremony if they want.

Concern was raised by the facility representative that there is only 6000 chairs ordered for Lane Stadium. If additional chairs are needed for the field there would be an additional cost for delivery. A 1000-1500 chairs would have to be placed back into the end zone of the field.

Concerns were raised regarding how the script would recognize master students. Suggestions included having master students sit how undergraduates sit and provide a recognition similar to medical school.

The Committee Chair informed members an updated script will be needed and the issue of the reserve additional chairs would be examined in an attempt not to create a budget issue.

Upon further examination of the schedule it was brought to the committees attention the issue of Wednesday and final examination schedules. The Committee Chair informed the group this was a negotiation between Special Events Office and Deans to have ceremonies the day of finals. In the future the schedule should be created not to overlap with final day and not ask families and guests to stay for an entire week. The committee was reminded that the university is running out of available time and venue spaces for the growing university and request. The issue of Deans not being happy about moving two ceremonies to Burruss Hall was brought forth; however, there was no other options available.

It was suggested in the future all college ceremonies return to Lane Stadium and the budget be increased for the rising cost of rentals and need carpeting being needed for Cassell Coliseum backup rain location.

The guest representing the northern Virginia campus and graduation ceremonies brought forth her concerns that their master students lost the opportunity to be recognized at a master ceremony and inquired to whom feedback could be provided. Previously these students had the opportunity to take a graduate school sponsored buss from northern Virginia to Blacksburg to participate in the master commencement ceremony. With master students now recognized at each college a buss cannot be arranged. This has removed an opportunity for these graduates to feel connected to campus. The committee chair requested the graduate school dean office and other deans be informed of the issue to be reexamined for next year's schedule. The Graduate School representative reminded the committee a process is in place for people to submit feedback and encouraged people to provide feedback. Additional feedback can be sent directly to Janice Austin or Dean Surprenant as they have google form for tracking comments and concerns.

The issue of College of Engineering limiting the number of guests was brought forth. This was to accommodate the Dean's request of their ceremonies location be Cassell Coliseum. This may have to be revised in the future.

Emergency Management guests brought forth the issue that Wednesday and Thursday evening hours can be problematic due to weather and would be better if in the future ceremonies were morning or early afternoon.

Safety concerns were raised and the use of magnetometers. Suggestions included Virginia Tech Police Department needing anticipated attendance for Moss Arts Center and Burruss Hall to determine if they are needed or having Deans request if they want them in place. Adding more magnetometers would have an additional cost and would require more officers to work.

Spring Volunteer Timeline:

Colleges Representatives will have to arrange volunteer marshals for the University Ceremony. Three volunteer marshals will be requested from each college. Volunteer marshals are also required for the Graduate School Ceremony. One volunteer in regalia will be required from each college. The Committee Chair will send this request after spring break. Names must be submitted by the end of April.

Commencement Speaker Update

A speaker has been secured for the University Ceremony. However, the names was not released to the committee as it has not been released to the public.

The student speakers for the University Ceremony are still in the selection process. In past there has been three student speakers to provide an opener, class president speech, and a closer. The decision was made after last spring that the three speeches have become too similar and therefore were reduced in number. Moving forward the Fall Commencement Ceremony will have one student speaker and the Spring Commencement Ceremony will have two speakers. The students are now required to submit their speeches ahead of time and are voted on to provide the best experience for guests and graduates.

A suggestion was made to maybe have one of the student speakers at the University Ceremony be a master student for inclusion purposes.

With no further business, the meeting was concluded at 12:31 p.m.