

University Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 6, 2019
12:15 p.m.
Holtzman Alumni Center Boardroom

Present: Diane Zahm (chair), Hans Robinson (marshal), Wat Hopkins (director of ushers), Janice Austin, Jamie Cowell-Lucero, Jay Crone, Lara Khansa, Scotland Leman, Billy Lin, Kim O'Rourke, Cheryl Peterson, Cara Spicer, Michael Stowe, Anthony Watson, Matt Winston

Absent: Nicole Akers, Tanyel Turkaslan Bulbul, Deborah Dickerson, Rebecca Funk, Lance Jones, Marcella Kelly, Greg Klatt

Guests: Tom Gallemore, Mike Kutnak, Kelly McCann, Margie Murray, Tara Nepper, Dennis Robarge, Graham Smith, Bailey Spell for Greg Klatt

Dr. Zahm called the meeting to order at 12:17 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Zahm asked for any changes to the November 7 and December 5, 2018, Commencement Committee meeting minutes. With no updates, the minutes were approved as written.

Debrief of Fall Commencement

Zahm asked for any issues with regard to ushers or marshals. During the Graduate School ceremony there were a couple of marshals that didn't know what to do. Also, there were ushers that thought they could leave once the crowd was seated.

McCann indicated that she received a bill from Rhino for "house management," basically the same thing an usher would do.

It also appears that there is still a problem with guests getting the clear bag policy message. The message will be put in the call letter for ushers and marshals as well.

Winston and Zahm met with the Provost to discuss the space issue. At each ceremony held in Cassell, and sometimes at Lane Stadium, there has to be additional seating in the stands held for students should space run out on the floor.

Winston indicated that he and Zahm also discussed how to encourage more faculty participation in Commencement. Dr. Clarke was incredibly receptive to the conversation and asked if stretching the ceremonies out over several days would be beneficial? Their recommendation is not to stretch ceremonies over several days, recognizing the time families would need to be on campus. Dr. Clarke shared that he thought Virginia Tech's undergraduate ceremony is the best ceremony he has seen in his time in higher education.

A faculty member of the committee shared that she really wanted to attend but had exams in the last period on the last day and she has all seniors. She would love to have an extra day to grade exams, and has had tight deadlines. Faculty must provide tentative grades in the spring because many of the students will actually receive their diploma at the graduation ceremony.

Because of the additional number of ceremonies, and that there are ceremonies held prior to Saturday, many students do not actually receive diplomas. So the question is "Should we provide diplomas at all in the spring? And would it be more efficient to give faculty more time to get grades in and not have to do tentative grades?" Diplomas may be mailed. Students do not need an actual diploma as proof to get a job. They just need a document that proves they have completed, and there are ways to do that with a transcript or a letter. No

decisions have been made, but this is a very complex system of grading and diplomas and how we schedule ceremonies, getting families in and having places for them to stay, and all of this has to be considered, and those are reasons not to stretch out ceremonies over several days. It takes family members away from jobs, and it is expensive to be here for several days.

One thing that can be looked at is the accommodation for students with dual degrees so they can attend ceremonies in each department or college. Students should choose at which ceremony they plan to participate. This would decrease numbers at several ceremonies and scheduling would become less complicated, potentially opening up space.

These are mainly Spring Commencement issues, not December, but there are some generic Commencement issues that we have to deal with. So, at what point do we say, we will not provide diplomas in the spring? And we would love the University to emphasize and encourage faculty participation. This is why we are here, but of course, if we are already pressed for space, that is also an issue to deal with. The amount of participation varies between colleges and departments.

Ultimately, this committee can make a recommendation, but the decision lies with the President, the Provost, the deans, the Graduate School, and others. Again, this is complicated, and there will probably be many more discussions within this committee over the next several meetings and years.

We want Commencement to be a social day with graduates, families and faculty without having to make limitations with tickets. As we grow and have bigger and bigger programs that need larger spaces, we will have to deal with those issues. Even as Business and Engineering grow, even with the use of Cassell Coliseum, the ceremonies are getting longer and longer, and that space is very hot by the end of the day. Squires Old Dominion Ballroom will no longer be available so we will be pinched for space even further.

Spring Commencement

Speakers for the University, Graduate and National Capital Region ceremonies have been invited, but no official announcement has been made.

The call for volunteers will go out after spring break and responses will be due by April 26. This is earlier than the schedule for the fall, but necessary because of the number of volunteers needed and their impact on logistics. The call will include information about the clear bag policy.

Today is the 100th Day until graduation. The kickoff event is being held here in the Holtzman Alumni Center, and with another large event at The Inn, space is tight. This is the hottest place in town right now.

Adjournment

With no further committee business, the meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Future Meeting Dates – Holtzman Alumni Center Boardroom – 12:15 p.m.

April 3, 2019

May 1, 2019