UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, November 7, 2001
12:15 to 1:30 p.m.
President’s Boardroom, 210 Burruss Hall

PRESENT: Ed Henneke, Kim O’Rourke, Larry Hincker, Charles Payne for J. Allen, Bill Conger, Dixie Reaves, Dan Taylor, Pat Goodrich, John Beach for Bill Elvey, Mitzi Vernon, Stan Burke, Bill Green, Randy Billingsley, Harry Robertshaw, Audrey Zink-Sharp, Brad Klein, Mary Ann Lewis for Janet Johnson, Michelle Jefferson.

GUESTS: Margie Murray, Jack Ridinger.

ABSENT: Bud Brown, Sherry Schofield-Tomschin, Reba Crawford, Erin Miller, Grant Hill.

Chairman Henneke called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m.

Approval of October 3, 2001, Minutes
With one addition to the absentee listing, Mary Ann Lewis, Conger moved that the minutes be approved, Vernon seconded, and the minutes were unanimously approved as corrected.

Request from the Undergraduate Honor System to Wear Special Sashes
The committee began the discussion by asking if the Honor System shouldn’t write a proposal for this request. Would participants include only the justices? Tassel colors are associated with each college. Honors students wear college-colored sashes, and international students wear sashes indicating his/her country. Would this be opening a Pandora’s box to allow the Honor System to wear special sashes?

Vernon supported the idea of trying to promote academic integrity, but noted that those who really need to hear the message would not be attending the Commencement ceremonies. Henneke will ask the Honor System for a proposal for the December meeting. (Proposal Attached.)

Planning for Fall Commencement
Michelle Jefferson began the discussion by asking questions about the availability of caps and gowns, and about the graduate school reception following the ceremony. It was indicated to her and everyone present that the information is printed in the Fall Commencement Brochure. Michelle was given several copies to take with her.

Another issue was that of the non-availability of diplomas at the fall ceremony. The envelope that students are handed when they cross the stage contains other information, but not the diploma. Diplomas are mailed in the spring. However, as soon as grades are processed, the student’s transcript provides proof of graduation. Conger mentioned that we are one of very few universities that actually provide diplomas in the spring. Henneke mentioned that the Commencement Committee reviewed this issue years earlier, and it was determined that because of financial reasons, the diplomas were all printed in the spring. After other remarks, it was decided that this issue should be revisited, but it could not be remedied for this fall’s ceremony. It would require faculty getting the grades in earlier, and the review of the financial resources. Henneke will work with O’Rourke regarding this issue.
Discussion Regarding the Need for Special Security Measures at Cassell Coliseum
The Security Measures Subcommittee has met to discuss the Commencement security issues brought up at the November 7 meeting. Henneke will provide a detailed review of the outcome at the December meeting.

Below is a list of comments and discussion items brought forth at the November meeting:

- Although this is looked upon as a happy event with a different array of guests and family than typically attend an athletic event, we should not ignore the current world situation.
- Trained personnel would have to be hired to check purses, camera cases, coats, etc.
- Advance notice would need to be communicated to family and friends attending that packages and gifts would not be allowed into the coliseum. This information should be included in future brochures.
- Special signage would be needed that all guests would be subject to search.
- There would be no re-entry into the coliseum after departure.
- Should gowns be searched? Should we ask students not to put on gowns until they arrive at the coliseum?
- This information should be posted on the VT website, and communicated to students by email from the list serve available through the Registrar’s Office.
- Ushers (faculty volunteers) would need special training to assist event staff on how to handle a search. Staff would include VT Police, Physical Plant employees, etc. Because this commencement is so close to Christmas, it may be difficulty to hire or recruit additional volunteers without considerable expense.
- Should admission tickets be implemented for future commencements?
- Not only searches, but also other issues should be reviewed such as evacuation and fire safety planning, especially for guests in wheelchairs.
- Additional seating for guests with impaired family members in wheelchairs should be provided.
- Because Cassell does not have ample room, no recessional takes place in the fall ceremony. There is nowhere to go.
- Approximately 1000 graduates are expected with an estimate of 7-8,000 total on site.

Ridinger was asked what measures were taken at basketball games, which are somewhat comparable events. He indicated that those procedures included low-key searches of purses, backpacks, etc., but that no bomb dogs were utilized. Security personnel were hired to backup the events staff.

Use of bomb dogs is not feasible in all situations. It would take approximately two days to search Cassell, and the building would have to be secured for the entire time up until the commencement ceremonies. Hincker did not think that we would want to have any higher security than used at a basketball game.

The Security Measures subcommittee will address these many issues.

December graduates’ requests to walk in the spring
Because of the late date for this year’s fall Commencement Ceremony, the Registrar’s Office has received requests from fall graduates to process in the spring. The committee approved these requests, but noted that a graduate’s name would appear in the fall program and not in the spring program, unless the student made other arrangements through the Registrar’s Office.
Other Items
It was requested that the colleges get faculty volunteers’ (ushers’) names to Conger and Taylor as soon as possible.

It was noted that the March Commencement Committee meeting was originally scheduled during Spring break. The meeting will now be held on March 13.
The Virginia Tech Undergraduate Honor System is an integral part of the University. We are a student run organization. All of the students involved in the honor system are full time students who are volunteers. The Honor System serves the university population. Whenever there is an honor code violation, we investigate it and perform a judicial hearing. At a university this large, that is quite an accomplishment. Typically, we get over 100 cases per semester. Although the bulk of our cases come into the office at the end of the semester, we do have cases turned in during the semester. This means that we are constantly running cases.

Currently, there are seven Associate Justices in the Honor System. We are in charge of investigating the case once it is submitted to the office, and then running the judicial hearing. We call this processing the case. The Associate Justices work very hard to process these cases in a timely fashion. We all know how important it is for everyone involved in the case to have his or her case run quickly and efficiently. Last year, the six Associate Justices processed over 500 cases for the year. This is quite a feat by itself, but we were all full time students also.

We are proposing that members of the Honor System be permitted to wear a sash or a cord of a certain color to recognize that a vast service was given to the University. Ideally, these sashes or cords would be either orange or maroon. This would be unique in that only the Virginia Tech Honor System would be wearing them. Since these colors are our school colors, and our school motto is “Ut Prosim,” we feel that these colors would be beneficial to show our dedication and service to the University.

The Honor System consists of Student Associate Justices and student Panel Members. We would like to see the Associate Justices get recognized for what they have done for the Honor System, but we would also like to give the Panel Members some recognition too. The panel members are just as much of an integral part of the Honor System as the Associate Justices are.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,
Amanda Cockrell
Associate Chief Justice