COMMENCEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
Wednesday, March 12, 2003  
12:15 p.m.  
President's Boardroom, 210 Burruss Hall

PRESENT: Bill Stringer for Jerry Allen, Norraine Bailey Spencer for Randy Billingsley, Bud Brown, Theresa Cassino, John Beach for Bill Elvey, Jerry Gibson, Pat Goodrich, Larry Hincker, Vinod Lohani, Kim O'Rourke, Dean Stauffer, Dan Taylor.

ABSENT: Ed Henneke, Greg Brown, Reba Crawford, Leon Geyer, Bill Green, Grant Hill, Brad Klein, Dixie Reaves, Nicole Reynolds, Sherry Schofield-Tomschin, Diane Zahm.


Chairman Taylor called the meeting to order at 12:17 p.m.

Approval of Minutes – February 5, 2003
Dr. Taylor asked for a motion on the approval of the minutes from February 5. With a first from Brown, and a second by O'Rourke, the minutes were approved as written.

University Commencement Speaker
O'Rourke announced that the keynote speaker for the Spring 2003 University Commencement Ceremony will be The Honorable Leroy Hassell, Sr., the first African American to be appointed as Chief Justice of the Virginia Supreme Court.

2003 University Band Tour
McKee announced that the executive vice president had approved the funds for the tour of the university band prior to Commencement. Dr. McKee thanked the committee for their support.

Announcement from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
With the inclusion of the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Exercise to this college, next year they will have outgrown the use of Burruss Hall for their ceremony.

Spring 2003 Commencement Planning
Beach reiterated the fact that very little faculty and/or staff assistance, especially Physical Plant personnel would be available on Saturday to assist with college ceremonies.

Lohani wanted to make sure that more security was on site during the college ceremony transitions on Saturday in Cassell Coliseum. Spencer suggested that for the Business ceremony guests not be allowed to enter until 1 p.m. It was stated that Business and Engineering would be hiring event staff, but that it was important that the volunteer rescue squad be on site.

To assist with transition, it was suggested that at the end of each ceremony, it should be announced that guests should exit through certain doors, and guests coming in, should enter through certain doors. Beach indicated that signs could be made if he received requests early for the sign shop.
Taylor noted that the requests for marshals and ushers for each college had been sent out.

Goodrich announced that the graduate commencement speaker would be Dr. Debra Stewart, President, Council of Graduate Schools. This guest speaker would be a departure from having an in-house speaker for fall and spring. The Graduate School will continue to have an in-house faculty speaker at the fall ceremony.

Newly updated information for the Virginia Tech website will be posted soon with information for the disabled—especially information on wheelchair rental. Special parking passes will be available, but must be picked up in advance.

Beach indicated that the rain plan for the Friday university ceremony is marginal at best—basically, it doesn’t work. Should the ceremony be cancelled, where would the speaker speak? O’Rourke noted that the President would be very reluctant to cancel the ceremony and would want to implement the “rain plan.”

Beach indicated that umbrellas would be available for members of the stage party should light showers appear. The guests are also urged (in the brochure) to bring umbrellas and rain jackets in case of showers. When discussing the rain plan, and when it would be announced that the university ceremony be moved indoors, Beach indicated that a 5 p.m. announcement would be too late, and that a 3 p.m. announcement should be made.

Because Cassell Coliseum is really too small to accommodate all university ceremony guests, Spencer asked if we could broadcast to other locations from Cassell Coliseum. Hincker said that he and his staff would look into the matter and report back to the committee with the possibilities.

**Honors Student Procession**

Since 1991, the honors program has been holding a pre-ceremony reception for honors students. In the past, this reception was held on Friday since the University Ceremony wasn’t until Saturday. Because the students will be pressed for time this year, Jack Dudley requested that the honors students be able to process from Hillcrest Hall to the stadium and be seated as a group.

The reception will begin at 4:30 p.m. on Friday at Hillcrest. The students will march to Lane Stadium, beginning at 6:30 p.m., through a route approved by the campus police, and will enter the stadium through the tunnel at the north end zone. Bagpipers will lead them from Hillcrest to the tunnel entrance. At the start of the regular procession, the honors students will march in through the tunnel and be seated in the first seats on the left facing the stage. The stage party will process from the south. By the Wednesday before commencement, the number of honors students will be known, so there should be an accurate count on the number of seats to be reserved. In the event of inclement weather, the Honors Student Procession would be cancelled.

*After considerable review and discussion, Brown moved that this procession be allowed, McKee seconded, and with an amendment by O’Rourke that this process be reviewed prior to Spring 2004, the committee approved the separate procession of honors students.*

**Fall 2003 Commencement Ceremony Planning**

Hincker indicated that last fall $10,000 was raised by hotels to help defer costs for the Fall Commencement ceremony. He doesn’t believe the hotels will be as receptive this year.
It was mentioned that the committee could save money by holding both the graduate and undergraduate ceremonies on Friday instead of Friday and Saturday. The university ceremony could be held on Friday evening at 6:30 p.m. or 7 p.m., after the graduate school ceremony.

This would mean that most parents would only need a one-night stay at local hotels. However, after checking, Hincker’s office indicated that the majority of local hotels do require a two-night stay on the weekends of commencement.

If the university does cancel fall commencement—even temporarily, this could mean even more space problems in the spring, but again, holding both Fall ceremonies on Friday, this could save money. Goodrich indicated that this would not be a problem for the Graduate School.

If the Coliseum were set with enough chairs for the University ceremony, would there be too many empty seats at the Graduate School ceremony? Alternatively, the university ceremony could be held first, but then parking on a workday could be an issue. By holding the University Ceremony first, Physical Plant would just have to remove excess chairs in order to set up for the Graduate School Ceremony to follow.

The committee was asked to consider these options for discussion at the April meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:15 p.m.