COMMENCEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, September 10, 2003
12:15 p.m.
President’s Boardroom, 210 Burruss Hall
(Final Approved Revision)

Present: Ed Henneke, Bill Stringer for Jerry Allen, Bud Brown, Theresa Cassino, John Beach for Bill Elvey, Jerry Gibson, Pat Goodrich, Larry Hincker, Brad Klein, Vinod Lohani, Kim O’Rourke, Dixie Reaves, Nicole Reynolds, Sherry Schofield-Tomschin, Rich Sorensen, Dan Taylor

Absent: Randy Billingsley, Robyn Daniel, Brian James, Dean Stauffer, Diane Zahm

Guests: Susan Angle, Greg Beecher, Dave McKee, Margie Murray, Lyndell Price, Jennie Reilly, Hunter Gresham

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

Approval of Minutes – April 30, 2003
Moved by Brown and seconded by O’Rourke, the minutes were approved as written, with the exception of a change in the attendance listing showing Diane Zahm as absent. She should not have been listed at all.

Announcement
It was reiterated that Fall Commencement would be held on Friday, December 19, 2003. The undergraduate ceremony will be held at 11:00 a.m., and the graduate ceremony will be held at 3:00 p.m.—each in Cassell Coliseum.

Recap of Spring Ceremony

Space Issues
Klein indicated that Veterinary Medicine encountered a space problem in Squires for their reception, and incurred additional expenses to move their event to another location, in addition to losing people in transition. He felt that since the schedule for the Friday ceremony had changed that Veterinary Medicine should have received and should in the future receive first choice for space at Squires.

Change in Time for University Undergraduate Ceremony
Gibson stated that he thought the environment was nice for the evening University Ceremony. He did indicate that several parents had questions about where their kids were seated on the field. This information in printed in the flyer. It was suggested that this information also be printed in the Commencement Program and listed on the website.

Brown indicated that the Honors procession went very well, but they ran out of seats for this group. A more accurate number needs to be provided to Physical Plant for seat blocking purposes.
Usher/Marshal Volunteers and Faculty Participation

Henneke asked about the usher/marshal assignments. He understood that there were many no-shows and that several ushers/marshals did not call to notify anyone--therefore placing others in the position of struggling to find replacements. Taylor indicated that he didn't think the problem was any worse than normal, but the timing made it difficult to find substitutes.

Brown indicated that his college had a problem getting volunteers—especially after recent budget cuts. Gibson stated that the College of Agriculture sends a letter with a spreadsheet during the fall and spring to faculty requesting volunteers on a rotating basis with alternate volunteers included.

Reaves thought that each college has different ways of getting faculty on a volunteer list, and that the college should make sure that the faculty member knows that he or she has been appointed—maybe a letter from Taylor or Reaves to the Committee representatives would help. Sorensen suggested that this letter be sent to the colleges’ associate deans for them to handle.

Goodrich indicated that retired faculty might be interested in assisting. Lohani indicated that we should ask for more volunteers than needed. Taylor said that the assignments should be preassigned so that holes could be filled. Schofield-Tomschin asked if the volunteers get reminder notices. The answer was no, but they are mailed a schedule within two to three weeks of the ceremony.

Gibson indicated that at UVA it was expected that faculty march, and that there seems to be an apathy here with regard to faculty participation. Brown indicated that the tone should be set at the top. Henneke stated that at UVA faculty really participate and that it seems to have become a tradition of walking on the grounds. How can we motivate Virginia Tech faculty to attend?

Reilly thought we should remarket Commencement as a ceremony that is not unfriendly as it once was. Henneke stated that this is the most important event of the year. O'Rourke said that a letter could be sent out by Dr. Steger urging faculty to attend, but that he would not make participation a requirement.

Spring Ceremony Changes After Restructuring/Space Coordination

It was asked if the Commencement Committee schedules space for college and departmental ceremonies. Henneke said that the Committee is not responsible for the scheduling of college and department ceremonies, but should we intervene and have some oversight over the planning for spring ceremonies—especially with regard to space problems and disputes. We do expect that there will be more scheduling problems with regard to space in the spring of 2004.

*There will be eight colleges and numerous college ceremonies for Spring 2004, and it was moved by Sorensen that this committee hold central oversight during the planning stages until the final schedules have been confirmed. With a second by Gibson, the committee unanimously agreed that a space survey will be done for Spring 2004 ceremonies, and that the Commencement Committee would have oversight over this process.*

Beecher indicated that we should do a space survey. Hunter Gresham will prepare a listing with potential space to provide to Murray for survey needs.
Fall Commencement Scheduling for Future Dates
It was requested that the committee make a decision regarding Fall Commencement dates for future years. Although Fall 2003 is a trial year, unless problems arise, the committee anticipates that Fall Commencement ceremonies for undergraduate and graduate students will continue to be held on one day. It was felt that the committee needed to get this information out so that students and parents could be aware of this schedule in advance.

Although the ceremony would be held on one day instead of two, it is expected that hotels will still require a two-night stay for Commencement in the fall and the spring. Instead of a Friday/Saturday night stay, parents may choose to stay on Thursday and Friday nights—making it necessary to get the word out as soon as possible.

The Committee decided to make a decision at the February 2004 meeting. It was indicated to Hincker that communication to families and students is very important. Hincker indicated that there were at least six means of getting this information posted. There will be a notice on the Virginia Tech home page posted as soon as possible.

It was asked if the University would close early on the day of the ceremony based on parking needs. Beach indicated that most students have left the university of this time, and that parking in the Commuter and Lane Stadium parking lots would be readily available.

Beach suggested that some information be put in the student handbook and provided to incoming students during orientation—information such as book hotels at least one year in advance of graduation. It was also suggested that information be placed in the newsletter that is mailed to parents.

In response to a question from a member of the committee asking us to remind him of why we’re having both ceremonies on Friday. Beach indicated that it is easier on physical plant personnel at that time of the year to complete their work on Friday. Henneke pointed out it is easier to get faculty volunteers on Friday and that the athletic association has pleaded with us to make the Coliseum available as soon as possible for basketball.

Permits Needed for Tents
Beach also indicated that we need to make colleges and departments aware of the fact that if tents are used for ceremonies and they are more than 900 square feet or more than 50 people, they must request a permit thirty days in advance of need. No tents will be allowed without a permit according to the Division of Engineering and Buildings for the state.

Other Items — Broadcasting / Accessibility
Reilly indicated that the captioning and interpreters for Commencement has become an added expense, and that if we continue to broadcast, this will have to be done in accessible format. There is no space on the Jumbotron to project the interpreter, and she suggested a separate screen with closed captioning.
It was also noted by a member of the committee that it is very difficult for individuals with accessibility needs to get into Burruss Hall for ceremonies. There are no signs, and it was indicated that ushers or marshals or greeters should be used to assist with this problem in the future. Beach indicated that the University Architect’s office is working on appropriate signage.

The south end zone and fourth level handicap seating sections in Lane Stadium were full during the Spring 2003 ceremony, and this was even with the threat of inclement weather. More ushers will be needed to assist with directing these guests to accessible seating.

**West Side Construction**

It was also noted by McKee that with the construction beginning on the west side of Lane Stadium after the Fall 2004 football season, it may become necessary to use only the east stands for seating. It may also be another ceremony in which a processional may not be held.

The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.