University Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, October 4, 2006  
12:15 p.m.  
325 Burruss Hall

Present: Ed Henneke, Bill Stringer for Jerry Allen, Bud Brown, Michelle Czamanske, Russell Davis, Ellington Graves, Larry Hincker, Kathy Hosig, Jean Kampe, Brad Klein, Brian Mihalik, Jerry Niles, Kim O’Rourke, Lyndell Price, Dixie Reaves, Dean Stauffer, Dan Taylor, Linda Tegarden

Absent: Michael Dunleavy, Bill Green, Brian James, Susanna Rinehart, 

Guests: Margie Murray, April Myers, Eric Wininger, Leslie Simmers, Donna Hodges

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

Approval of Minutes
O’Rourke moved that the minutes for the September 6, 2006, meeting be approved. With a second from Czamanske, the minutes were approved unanimously.

Presentation of University Awards at the Spring University Ceremony
Henneke opened up the floor to discussion about the letter he received from Dr. Steger asking for the committee’s recommendation relative to the presentation of University Awards during the Spring University Commencement ceremony. Historically, the university has conferred the University Distinguished Achievement Award (UDA) at the spring Commencement Ceremony. However, because there has not been a Founders Day, for the past two years, the University has awarded not only the UDA, but also the Ruffner Medal and two Alumni Distinguished Service Awards at the spring University Commencement Ceremony. Tegarden indicated that after the last University Commencement Committee meeting, the College of Business Commencement Committee voted to recommend that the additional awards not be given out during the spring University Ceremony because it would not allow the proper recognition for the award recipients, and it would be detrimental to the students to add additional time to the ceremony. It was then mentioned that it took nine minutes for four awards to be presented at the Spring 2006 ceremony, and the recipients were thrilled to have been a part of the ceremony. The Ruffner Medal and the University Distinguished Achievement (UDA) Award recipients are not required to be alumni of the university but most of the time they are. O’Rourke shared with the committee comments from Dr. Tom Tillar, Vice President for Alumni Relations, indicating that the Alumni Distinguished Service (ADS) Awards were actually created before the Ruffner Medal and the UDA Award. Hincker made the point that if colleges give out awards during their individual ceremonies, then it would seem logical to present the University’s awards at the University Ceremony. Reaves commented that the proper venue for the awards to be presented is a Founder’s Day ceremony, but since there is no longer a Founder’s Day ceremony, the next most appropriate venue is Commencement. Reaves then suggested that only a few highlights be read for each award recipient rather than the entire biography contained in the program. It was then reiterated that the proposal at hand states that the award recipients would only stand to receive their award and would not make remarks at the ceremony. Henneke acknowledged that there is no question that the award recipients deserve recognition, but in his view Commencement should be to honor the graduating students and not people who graduated years ago. He was not in favor of the University Commencement Ceremony being used to fix a problem with Founder’s Day.
Hincker made a motion that the proposal to Dr. Steger outlined in his letter of September 4, 2006, to Dr. Henneke be accepted, with the recommendation that there be only three total awards presented during the ceremony: the Ruffner Medal, the University Distinguished Achievement Award, and one Alumni Distinguished Service Award. An exception would be made to allow two Alumni Distinguished Service Awards to be presented in Spring 2006 since those recipients had already been selected by the Alumni Association. Further, as part of the motion, the Commencement Committee recommends that the citation read for each recipient include only highlights rather than the entire biography, and that the recipients not be offered the opportunity to make remarks during the ceremony. O’Rourke seconded the motion. The motion passed with eight votes in favor, seven votes in opposition, and three abstentions.

It was confirmed that the recommendation to the President will not affect the Graduate Alumni Achievement Award given out at the Graduate School ceremony.

**Change in Undergraduate Academic Regalia**

Donna Hodges from Oak Hall and Leslie Simmers with the University Bookstore gave a presentation proposing that undergraduate and master’s regalia be branded with the university logo. Hodges informed the committee that she attends many graduate fairs across the country, and one of the things that students comment on when they get their caps and gowns is that the gowns look the same as those they wore when they graduated from high school. Students are looking for something unique. She indicated that other universities that have adopted the new design have seen an increase in ceremony participation of about 18 percent. O’Rourke inquired about the additional cost to the students. Hodges indicated that the additional cost would only be approximately five to six dollars. She assured the committee that the price was not a promotion and would not increase after the first year. Hodges brought several gowns from other universities as well as a prototype gown for Virginia Tech for the committee to see. The Virginia Tech prototype undergraduate/master’s gown had two flaps on the front of the gown on which the University Seal was embroidered. Similarly, the Virginia Tech doctoral robe that Oak Hall produces has the University Seal embroidered on the gown itself. Hincker then indicated that if the committee accepts the concept of a new design for the undergraduate/master’s regalia, then University Relations will work on an appropriate symbol to embroider on the flaps. Henneke questioned whether the design meets the ACE guidelines. Hodges informed the committee that Oak Hall stays in constant communication with the American Council of Education (ACE) concerning requirements for academic regalia. The Academic Regalia Committee of ACE was dissolved approximately 15 years ago, but Oak Hall is working with ACE to have this committee revived. Oak Hall also works closely with other companies to keep some sense of order. Some other companies are personalizing regalia with a silk screen on the yoke of the gown instead of attaching embroidered flaps to the front of the gown. Hosig asked if there is currently a contract with a specific company for the caps and gowns. Henneke confirmed that Oak Hall is the current supplier for regalia in the University Bookstore. Hodges indicated that she would need a decision by December in order to have the regalia ready for the spring ceremony. Davis stated that he personally would be willing to pay the additional five to six dollars to have the branded regalia, but he will raise the issue at his next class officers’ meeting to obtain more input. Hodges left two Virginia Tech prototype gowns, which will be available for viewing in Margie Murray’s office in 219 Burruss Hall.
Presentation of Master's Diplomas at the Spring Graduate School Ceremony
Henneke opened the floor for discussion on the motion made on April 5, 2006, to have the Commencement Committee recommend strongly to the Dean of the Graduate School that diplomas be presented to master's degree candidates during the spring Graduate School ceremony beginning as soon as possible and preferably with the spring 2006 ceremony. The motion in April 2006 passed unanimously. The response from the Graduate School was that they could not do so for the Spring 2006 ceremony, but they would consider it for future ceremonies. Mihalik indicated that the Graduate School has not received complaints from any student about the process of receiving their diplomas after the ceremony. Henneke indicated that the Commencement Committee has long taken the stance that diplomas should be handed out during the spring ceremonies. The Registrar’s Office manages to get thousands of bachelor's diplomas in order for the Saturday Commencement ceremonies. Henneke mentioned that it is very important to treat all bachelor's, master's, and PhD students the same. O'Rourke noted that the Graduate School gains less than two hours of preparation time by giving diplomas out immediately after the ceremony as opposed to during the ceremony. Taylor pointed out that the diplomas need to be in the correct order so as to not hand a diploma to the wrong student, but it has been done in the past. It was suggested that students be required to confirm their plans to participate in the graduate ceremony a month before the ceremony. It was then suggested that at least one representative from each college could help with organizing the master's diplomas for the ceremony, and the college representatives who were present concurred. In response to a question from Mihalik, Henneke indicated that the Graduate School stopped handing out master's diplomas at the ceremony approximately three years ago. Henneke asked Mihalik to pass on the request to the Dean of the Graduate School.

Numbering of Fall/Spring Ceremonies
Henneke thanked Hincker for researching the matter thoroughly and proposing language for the cover of the Fall/Spring Commencement Program. The cover will read, “Fall (or Spring) Commencement in the _____ Year of the University.” It was determined that the calendar year of the University, not the academic year, will be used. This enables the same year to be printed on the program for both the Spring and the subsequent Fall program. The 135th year of the University will be printed on the Fall 2006 program, and the 136th year of the University will be printed on the Spring 2007 and Fall 2007 programs, and so on.

Planning for the Fall Ceremony
Mihalik announced that the Graduate School speaker will be Ben Davenport, former rector of the Board of Visitors.

It was suggested that the doors of the coliseum be propped open before the ceremony in order to cool the coliseum. Price indicated it may be against fire codes to leave the doors open, and he will have to get approval from the fire marshal.

With no other business, Brown moved to adjourn at 1:27 p.m.