Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 1, 2006
12:15 p.m.
President’s Boardroom, 210 Burruss Hall

Present: Ed Henneke, Bill Stringer for Jerry Allen, Jerry Via for Bud Brown, Deborah Cook, Sam Easterling, Jean Kampe, Brad Klein, Brian Mihalik, Kim O’Rourke, Lyndell Price, Dixie Reaves, Dean Stauffer, Dan Taylor

Absent: Sumeet Bagai, Russell Davis, Jerry Gibson, Ellington Graves, Bill Green, Larry Hincker, Brian James, Navin Manjooran, Jerry Niles

Guests: Brianna Robinson, Patrick Casey, April Myers, Jennie Reilly, Eric Wininger

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

Approval of Minutes
Klein moved that the minutes for the December 7, 2005, meeting be approved as written. With a second from Taylor, the minutes were approved unanimously.

Review of Fall 2005 Commencement
Henneke questioned if there were any problem areas that need to be addressed. Taylor suggested the placement of heater coils on the roof of the coliseum to prevent ice from forming. Henneke informed the committee that ice was falling off of the coliseum roof the day of the ceremony, and all entrances except the front entrance to the coliseum were blocked off as a safety precaution. Price indicated that having the physical plant employees block off the side entrances was the best way to maintain a safe environment.

Reaves thanked all of the college representatives for getting all of the volunteers. Henneke indicated that he had at least two phone calls prior to the ceremony from volunteers who were substituting for someone who was assigned to be either an usher or marshal, and they indicated that they had not received any instructions on what was expected of them. Henneke then asked if there is an administrative way that could keep track of any substitutes and forward any necessary communications to them. Taylor indicated that the original assigned volunteer is supposed to forward all communications to the substitute. Henneke stated that there are no guarantees that the information will be forwarded to the substitute. Taylor suggested having the instructions posted on the web as a PDF file.

Henneke informed the committee that there were several compliments from people who were thankful that the ceremony time was moved back three hours. This allowed for more travel time due to the inclement weather. [Note: Both the University ceremony and the Graduate School ceremony were delayed by three hours.]

Henneke conveyed that the committee appreciates the time and effort of the student musicians and that they did a great job. There was a miscue, but it was not noticed by most people in the audience. Taylor suggested that perhaps walkie-talkies could be used to improve communications.
Committee Support on Wind Symphony Tour
Henneke then questioned if the committee wanted to support the request from the Music Department for funding for the Wind Symphony tour. In the past, the procedure has been that the committee recommends approval to the EVP’s office to support a tour of approximately 60 musicians to various high schools around the state. These musicians will also play at the Spring Commencement ceremony. This tour will take place between exams and the University Commencement ceremony and creates good public relations for Virginia Tech.

Casey indicated that the budget is $13,000 and covers meals and one night’s lodging to provide concerts at schools in Salem, Richmond, and Charlottesville.

Cook made a motion to recommend to the EVP that Virginia Tech support the Wind Symphony tour. O’Rourke seconded the motion. With no further discussion, it passed unanimously.

Planning for Spring Commencement
O’Rourke stated that the Commencement phone line will be updated on Monday, February 13, 2006, and that Margie Murray has the contents to update the website which will be updated soon. She then indicated that April Myers is checking with all the colleges and departments for their contact people, and once that information is received the Commencement space survey will be sent out. Any decisions about ceremony locations should be made by March 1. O’Rourke then informed the committee of the costs to reserve the Latham Ballroom in the Inn at Virginia Tech which seats 640 people and the Theatre, which seats 125.

Henneke then questioned if Governor Kaine has committed to being the University Commencement speaker. O’Rourke indicated that the request is still under consideration. Henneke informed the committee that it has been one of our traditions to always ask the Governor in his first year in office to be the Commencement speaker.

O’Rourke informed the committee that a request had been received from the When U Dream a Dream Foundation to allow Kenny Gibson to speak at the University Commencement ceremony. Kenny Gibson is a seventeen-year-old who was paralyzed in a football accident. He apparently idolizes Michael Vick and through the Dream Foundation Michael called Kenny while he was in the hospital. This was videotaped and broadcast on Fox Channel 5. The Dream Foundation also arranged for Kenny to meet Michael at a practice and gave him an award from the Dream Foundation. Henneke asked if Kenny is a Virginia Tech student. Myers indicated he is still in high school. O’Rourke stated that the only connection is Michael Vick. It was suggested that an athletic event like the Spring Game might be a better venue. Henneke stated that the committee has had requests in the past from politicians and deans of other universities with a son or daughter graduating from Virginia Tech requesting to speak during the Commencement ceremony. Historically the committee has rejected these requests because the University ceremony is intended to honor the students that are graduating.

Price asked if the time of the ceremony will change back to 7:30 p.m. Henneke indicated that the University ceremony will begin at 7:30 p.m.

Henneke questioned the status of the stadium. Price indicated that there will be lights and at least half of the seating on the west side.
O’Rourke then explained that there is still no decision made on how to handle Founder’s Day, so the 5 awards will be conferred at the University Commencement ceremony, but none of the recipients will speak, so there should be no significant effect on the length of the ceremony. Henneke expressed concern that the decision last year to have the awards presented during the Commencement ceremony was made outside of the committee and according to the governance policies of the university the committee should be involved with this type of decision. O’Rourke explained that several years ago the Founder’s Day format was changed because it had grown into a lengthy ceremony and no one attended. The students that were formerly honored at Founder’s Day are now honored in April at the Student Awards Banquet. Faculty and Staff are honored at an event that happens in the fall. Because of these separate events, there is no longer a university setting appropriate to award the Ruffner Medal Award, the University Distinguished Achievement Award, and the Alumni Distinguished Service Awards. O’Rourke indicated that Commencement is the only event that will put these recipients before a large audience, which they deserve. Henneke indicated that the committee should discuss honoring these award recipients and make recommendations. The committee members expressed no objection to conferring these 5 awards at this year’s ceremony.

With no other business Taylor moved to adjourn at 12:40 p.m.