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

Approval of Minutes
Graves moved that the minutes for the December 6, 2006, meeting be approved. With a second from Brown, the minutes were approved unanimously.

Review of December Ceremony
Henneke suggested that the Graduate Ceremony have the candidates walk across the stage before the president confers degrees. This will eliminate the commotion that is currently happening while the president is speaking. This will also keep both the Graduate School and University ceremonies consistent. Mihalik indicated that he will take this suggestion back to the Graduate School.

There was one complaint from the family of a graduate about the use of an air horn during the ceremony, and it really hindered their enjoyment of the ceremony. It was suggested that if this happens in the future the ushers should ask the person to not use the air horn or get the police to take care of the situation.

Mihalik mentioned that the music went well during the ceremony.

Speaking Request - University Ceremony
Henneke brought a request to the committee from the Staff Senate president, a member of the stage party, who would like to be given the opportunity to speak at the University Commencement ceremony. The Staff Senate president was a member of the stage party for the first time at the Fall 2006 ceremony because this position was added as the staff representative to the Board of Visitors in August 2006. It was indicated to the Staff Senate president that time is already an issue and if one group is allowed to have a representative speak, then other groups will want the same opportunity. Currently the Faculty Senate president speaks to the graduates, but he/she is doing so on behalf of the faculty because they have a unique relationship with the students. It was the consensus of the committee not to add another speaker.

Report on Services for the Impaired – Jennie Reilly
Reilly gave a report in order for the committee to better understand what services are provided for the disabled during Commencement.
Unfortunately, there were three ushers assigned to accessibility that did not show up for the fall undergraduate ceremony. Henneke asked the college representatives to go back to the deans of their respective colleges to encourage their volunteers to fulfill their obligation or have a substitute fill in. These volunteers are really relied upon in order to greet people at the door who are in wheelchairs or need accessible seating.

There is short a training for the ushers that gives a walkthrough of the route for accessible seating. Because of ushers arriving late, the training had to be repeated several times. Reilly offered to give the instructions to Dan Taylor to include with the mailing sent to ushers prior to the ceremony.

A suggestion was also made to inform ushers to wear comfortable shoes to the ceremony.

Two ushers are always stationed at the Merryman entrance but they had no programs there to hand out at the fall ceremony. Lyndell indicated that Margie Murray can add that location to the list of locations where programs are delivered prior to the ceremony.

Reilly indicated that there is a need to expand the ambulatory seating. Mihalik suggested doing something more than just posting signs in order to keep guests out that are not in need of ambulatory seating. New signs are being made that will indicate that only one other family member may accompany an impaired guest in the reserved ambulatory seating area. Reilly mentioned the other family members will sit either in front of or behind the ambulatory area.

The rescue squad has an emergency wheelchair that can be used when needed. Reilly suggested including this information about the emergency wheelchair with the mailing that is sent out to the ushers prior to the ceremony.

Reilly indicated that a lot of calls are generated from the website where the disability and accommodation information is listed. The Services for Students with Disabilities website has all of the necessary information for anyone needing assistance for Commencement.

Reilly suggested changing the signage for the section where guests that need interpreters sit to indicate the purpose for the reserved seating.

There was a request to provide blankets for those sitting in the wheelchair section of the South End Zone during the spring university ceremony. It was very cold last spring during the ceremony and this section is located where there is a lot of wind. Henneke suggested getting the blankets used on airplanes. These blankets are quite warm and cannot be that expensive. O'Rourke indicated that the President's office will pay for the blankets. Reilly confirmed that the ADA Services office can take care of getting the blankets and bringing them to the ceremony. A suggestion was made to add a link to the National Weather Service on the Commencement webpage so that people can check the weather in Blacksburg.

Reilly then informed the committee that there are new accessible route maps available on line on the ADA Services website. A suggestion was made to include a map with the mailing that goes out to the ushers.
**Presentation of Master’s Diplomas on Stage at the Spring Ceremony**

Henneke introduced the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Karen DePauw, to the committee. Dean DePauw offered to come to the meeting in order to clarify why the master’s candidates do not get their diplomas on the stage during the Spring ceremony.

Dean DePauw stated that the Graduate School did receive the recommendation of the Commencement Committee to hand out diplomas to the master’s students as they cross the stage. This was discussed in great detail at several staff meetings and with the members of the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies. She decided to continue to give out the master’s diplomas at the Graduate Life Center after the ceremony for the following reasons:

- It is very difficult to clear all students in time to get the diplomas in order and keep them in order on stage. The deadline for clearing will have to be moved back and not as many diplomas can be awarded.
- When diplomas were given out on stage, some students received the wrong diploma.
- The ceremony is a celebratory event and students want to sit with their friends and have a more relaxed ceremony, rather than being required to sit in alphabetical order.
- Now, each student gets a very nice diploma cover that is a gift from the Graduate School and the Alumni Association. A letter is included in the diploma cover that gives instructions as to how to obtain his/her diploma.
- There is a celebration at the Graduate Life Center after the ceremony where students can pick up their diplomas and celebrate with family and friends.
- Students who did not clear by the deadline may clear by the time of the ceremony, and they can get their diplomas at the Graduate Life Center at the same time as those who cleared by the deadline.
- There is less stress on the staff because they do not have work all night to get the diplomas ready for the ceremony.
- The Graduate School has not received any complaints from any master’s students.

There was discussion as to having representatives from each of the colleges help with the process of getting the diplomas ready. Dean DePauw indicated that would not be possible because they would not have access to the students’ records, and it would create more work for the Graduate School staff to train the college representatives.

Members of the committee gave reasons as to why the master’s diplomas should be handed out on stage:

- To stay consistent with the other graduates who receive their diplomas on stage. It was noted that colleges that have 900 or more undergraduate students graduating (as compared with the 300-400 graduate students at the Graduate School ceremony) distribute diplomas to their undergraduates as they cross the stage.
- Over the years, some administrative offices have requested to not give out diplomas on stage, and the students have applied tremendous pressure to prevent this change from taking place.
- There is a great deal of pride the students feel when they walk across the stage with their diploma in their hand.
Master’s students should not be treated any differently than the other graduates. All other levels of undergraduate and graduate students receive their diplomas as they cross the stage.

Master’s students who attend the National Capital Region ceremony do receive their diplomas as they cross the stage, unlike their Blacksburg counterparts.

Most universities mail diplomas out to their students, but handing out diplomas on stage is one of the things that makes Virginia Tech unique.

Artis, who is now a Ph. D. Student, indicated that she really liked how the Graduate School ceremony was handled because she was able to march before she completed her master’s degree. She enjoyed the camaraderie with her friends and the relaxed ceremony. Undergraduate students are allowed to walk in the ceremony before receiving their degree with the approval of their college. If the student walks and does not receive his/her degree he/she will receive an envelope with instructions indicating how to obtain the diploma. It was also suggested that the Graduate School could hand out diplomas on stage to the students who have cleared and hand out envelopes with instructions to those who have not cleared.

It was then suggested to survey the master’s students to determine if they want to continue with the current process or receive their diplomas on stage. Dean DePauw will survey the Graduate Student Assembly to see if they want to continue with the current process. Some noted that it might be more informative to ask those who have already graduated.

Committee Support on Wind Symphony Tour

Henneke then asked 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 student musicians to various high schools around the state. These musicians will also play at the Spring Commencement ceremony. This tour creates good public relations for Virginia Tech and also lets area high school students see that they can attend Virginia Tech as music majors or as majors in another discipline and still have the opportunity to play music.

Casey indicated that the budget is $9,134 and covers meals, transportation, and one night’s lodging to provide concerts at schools in Radford, Pulaski, and Bristol.

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

Change in University Calendar

Mihalik mentioned that a change in the university calendar being considered would push Commencement back one week. This should not be much of a problem in the spring, but in the fall it would push the ceremony very close to the holidays.

The next Commencement meeting will be on Wednesday, March 14, 2007.

With no other business, Stauffer moved to adjourn at 1:28 p.m.