University Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, April 23, 2007  
12:15 p.m.  
President’s Board Room, 210 Burruss Hall

Present: Ed Henneke, Bud Brown, Michelle Czamanske, Ellington Graves, Clara Cox for Larry Hincker, Kathy Hosig, Jean Kampe, Brad Klein, Brian Mihalik, Mercy Azek for Chris Neck, Kim O’Rourke, Anthony Watson for Lyndell Price, Dixie Reaves, Susanna Rinehart, Dean Stauffer, Dan Taylor

Absent: Gen. Allen, Sharnnia Artis, Bill Green, Jerry Niles, Matt O’Leary, James Tyger

Guests: Patrick Casey, Wanda Hankins Dean, Karen DePauw, Angela Marshall, Margie Murray, April Myers, Jacqueline Nottingham, Jennie Reilly, Jessica Surace, Eric Wininger

Dr. Henneke called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. This special meeting was convened to discuss changes to the Commencement ceremony in consideration of the tragedy of April 16.

Approval of Minutes
Henneke informed the committee that the minutes from the April 4, 2007, meeting are not complete and will be dispensed for reading and approval at the May 2, 2007, meeting.

Special Commencement Ceremony Memorials
Dean DePauw shared the Graduate School’s plans to honor the nine Graduate School students who lost their lives in the tragic shooting on April 16, 2007. All posthumous degrees for the nine graduate students will be presented at the Graduate School ceremony. The posthumous degrees for the eighteen undergraduate students will be presented at each individual college or department ceremony on Saturday, May 12. DePauw indicated that the diplomas are already ordered and a company has offered to supply frames for all twenty-seven posthumous diplomas. Alumni Relations is taking care of getting class rings for the families of each student, and the Graduate School will be providing the two Ph.D. students’ families with hoods. DePauw indicated that most of the families of the nine graduate students are planning to attend. During the Images and Reflections portion of the Graduate School ceremony, there will be photos shown of all twenty-seven deceased students. O’Rourke mentioned that the office of University Relations has been working with the Office of Student Affairs to obtain photos of the deceased and permission from the families. It was suggested to have all posthumous degrees presented after the Interlude in the Graduate School order of ceremony because it is already a quiet time. DePauw will present the degrees by reading a paragraph about each student, stating the degree he/she has earned, and what family members are accepting the diploma. DePauw requested that the family members of the deceased students be seated in the first two rows on the right side facing the stage and to have a separate room away from the stage party to wait before the ceremony begins. A suggestion was made to use either the men’s or ladies’ basketball lounges as a place for the families to wait for the ceremony to begin. It was also determined to let the families decide if they want to be seated prior to the start of the processional or if they want to be seated just before the stage party. It was also decided that it would be best
for the families to recess after the stage party. The families will be given a choice of parking in either the tennis court parking lot or the coliseum lot. The tennis court lot will allow more privacy for the families.

There will be a dinner between the Graduate School ceremony and the University Ceremony provided for the families of the deceased in the East Lounge of the South End Zone and arranged by the President’s office.

There are currently seven buildings designated for Commencement housing and the Graduate Life Center is not one of the designated buildings. DePauw suggested the use of the Graduate Life Center to house the families of the deceased students in order to give them more privacy. DePauw indicated that there will be approximately eighty vacant rooms available to use. Czamanske indicated that the Graduate students that are staying this summer will be moved to the Alumni side of the Graduate Life Center and there will be available rooms for all families of the deceased. Wininger informed the committee that the office of Student Programs will provide bed linens for the families staying at the Graduate Life Center. [Note: Ultimately, one of the newer air-conditioned residence halls was used.]

Tyger questioned if the student speeches should be more somber as a result of the tragedy. The committee agreed that the speeches can acknowledge the loss but the end of the speech should be more celebratory.

Tyger then questioned if the graduates should wear a ribbon symbolizing the victims. The committee decided that it would be very appropriate for the students to all wear ribbons during the ceremony. Tyger indicated that he would work with the students to get the ribbons ready for Commencement.

O'Rourke suggested having pictures of the deceased students shown on the jumbo tron during the University ceremony. As the pictures are being shown Dr Tom Tillar could read the names while the President and Provost walk onto the field to present class rings to the family members.

There will be a separate room for the families of the deceased to remain before the University ceremony. The individual college representatives of the committee were asked to make similar arrangements to keep the families separate at the Saturday ceremonies.

Wanda Dean indicated that there are two diplomas ordered for the blended families as well as two rings being donated for blended families.

Rinehart mentioned that there really is a different task for this Commencement than any other. There needs to be a balance in celebrating those that are graduating and honoring those that lost their lives on April 16. She questioned the need for an inspirational speaker to help show the Virginia Tech community and everything it is and has become in spite of the tragic events on April 16. Reaves asked if there is going to be a review of all speeches before the ceremony. O'Rourke indicated that the keynote speaker (Abizaid) is concentrating on a sense of family, the need for healing, the need for paying tribute to those who sacrificed courage leadership, and how to move forward. [Note: An addition was made to the program for President Steger to give special remarks following the keynote address.]
Casey offered to have a special musical arrangement during the ceremony that could possibly be played while the pictures are being displayed on the Jumbo Tron.

Cox stated that the print shop needs to start printing the Commencement program next week. If biographies of the deceased are to be included they will have to be inserted into the center of the program because there is not time to include them in the body. O'Rourke suggested creating a separate publication for the deceased students and faculty. Taylor indicated that there would not be a problem handing out two different publications. [Note: A special “Remembrance” publication was produced to accompany the Commencement program.]

Henneke announced that the next meeting of the Commencement Committee will be on Wednesday, May 2, 2007.

With no other business, Brown moved to adjourn at 1:50 p.m.