Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, March 2, 2005  
12:15 p.m.  
Room 325 Burruss Hall

Present: Ed Henneke, Bill Stringer for Jerry Allen, Roger Avery, Bud Brown, Emily Aleshire, Deborah Cook, Robyn Daniel, Larry Hincker, Kim O’Rourke, Lyndell Price, Dan Taylor

Absent: Sumeet Bagai, Lay Nam Chang, Jerry Gibson, Ellington Graves, Bill Green, Brian James, Brad Klein, Vinod Lohani, Dixie Reaves, Dean Stauffer, Diane Zahm

Guests: Wendy Conner, Hunter Gresham, Patrick Casey, Margie Murray, April Myers, Eric Wininger

Dr. Henneke called the meeting to order at 12:16 p.m.

Approval of Minutes
Avery moved that the minutes for the February 2, 2005 meeting be approved as written. With a second from Brown the minutes were approved unanimously.

Distribution of Diplomas for Spring Commencement
Henneke informed the Committee that the Graduate School wants to mail master’s diplomas after the semester ends rather than give them out at the Graduate School Commencement Ceremony. He gave background information on how diplomas have been distributed. Historically diplomas have been handed to the students as they walked across the stage at the Graduate School Ceremony. Last Spring the Graduate School wanted to mail diplomas to the master’s candidates after the ceremony instead of handing them out. This development arose too late for the Commencement Committee to discuss and give feedback on that decision. After discussions involving the Graduate School, President’s Office, and Commencement Committee Chair, a compromise was reached wherein master’s students could pick up their diploma at the Graduate School offices for an hour after the ceremony. There is a concern that master’s students are not being treated the same as bachelor’s and Ph.D. students. Henneke then called for discussion on how to handle the distribution of master’s diplomas.

Avery clarified that Ph.D. students will receive their diploma as they cross the stage because they must be cleared for completion before they can even attend the Commencement Ceremony and the number of Ph.D. candidates is more manageable than the master’s candidates. It was discussed that formerly a diploma was ordered early in the year for each student who applied for a degree, and many of these diplomas were never used. During the ceremony the diplomas have to be kept in order, and in reality many of the master’s students do not actually get their diploma at the time of the ceremony. Instead they receive a letter stating what their remaining requirements are for completion. According to Avery, this system of handing out diplomas was inefficient and very stressful on the staff due to last-minute changes. Last year there was also an option given to the master’s candidates to have their diplomas mailed out or to pick them up at the Graduate School after the ceremony. Only about ten percent of the master’s students actually picked up their diplomas. A new system that Dean DePauw has implemented is to hand out a diploma cover containing a personalized letter for each student walking. It was indicated by Avery that the Dean of the Graduate School would like to continue using this system for handling of master’s diplomas. Henneke then clarified that only ten percent of the master’s candidates picked up their diplomas because the Graduate School was only open from 5:00 p.m. till 6:00 p.m. and the actual ceremony ended after 5:00
p.m., which did not give enough time for the students to get from Cassell Coliseum to Sandy Hall to pick up their diplomas. It was stated that the College of Engineering with approximately 850 bachelor’s candidates and the Pamplin College of Business with approximately 700 are able to have their diplomas ready for their Saturday ceremonies. It was determined that the registrar’s office works all day and night on Friday to ensure that the diplomas are ready the following day. Henneke indicated that the wrong message will be sent out if we cannot treat the master’s candidates equally. It was suggested that in many cases the master’s degree will be a student’s terminal degree from Virginia Tech, and we want to treat all students the same.

Henneke indicated that deadlines could be set earlier in order to allow more time to prepare diplomas.

A question was raised about having additional time, such as a week between the final exam and the Commencement Ceremony, in order to give the Graduate School and the registrar’s office more time to get the grades in and the diplomas ready. O’Rourke indicated that students and faculty would not hang around a week waiting for the ceremony. Hincker stated that other universities have their ceremony a week later, but the reason it works is because it is a tradition. Hincker also indicated that there is not enough time to add an additional week because the first summer session begins a week later. O’Rourke informed the committee that both the spring and fall semesters have to have an equal number of days, and if you add a week in the spring, you have to add a week in the fall.

Avery then indicated that Dean DePauw wants to do a good quality job, and if the diplomas are handed out at the ceremony, there is more room for error due to the late night work that it requires. Several committee members indicated that receiving a degree is a huge milestone and not getting the diploma at the ceremony is disheartening.

Avery then mentioned that in discussions with the Graduate Student Assembly, graduate students indicated that they are content to get their diploma in the mail as long as they get recognition at the ceremony. O’Rourke questioned if master’s candidates could receive their diplomas at the individual college ceremonies. Henneke stated that would not be feasible because the time allotted for each ceremony would not be sufficient. Avery indicated that the new company the Graduate School uses to handle the diplomas assures that graduates will receive their diplomas within the two weeks after the ceremony.

O’Rourke then questioned if the Graduate School could be kept open on Saturday with a minimal staff in order for students to pick up their diplomas. Avery stated that may be a possibility, but he would have to get approval from the Dean of the Graduate School.

Henneke informed the committee that comparisons have been made in the past on the cost of mailing the diplomas versus paying employees overtime to get diplomas ready for the ceremony, and the cost ended up being basically the same.

It was determined that Avery would relay to Dean DePauw that the committee supports handing out diplomas to master’s candidates at the ceremony. A vote to that effect is on record from a previous meeting.

Murray indicated that a determination on how master’s diplomas are to be distributed needs to be made by Thursday, March 3, 2005, in order to have the information printed in the Commencement brochure. [Note: the decision reached is that master’s students will not receive their diplomas at the ceremony but can pick them up at the Graduate School until 6:30 p.m.]
Planning for Spring Commencement
Henneke stated that he has only received three complaints from parents about the ceremony time change. One of those complaints dealt with invitations that were ordered over the winter break that had the incorrect ceremony time listed. After contacting the parent, Henneke explained the reason for the time change and the parent was satisfied with the explanation. The other two parents that made complaints have been contacted and messages have been left but as of now there has not be a response to the messages.

Daniels indicated that some parents still do not know the times of the ceremonies and they expect the students to keep them informed.

Academic Regalia Colors
Henneke informed the committee that there is still some confusion in the bookstore and with students as to the correct tassel colors that are assigned for each discipline. Murray indicated that the bookstore needs to know the official colors by March 14 at the latest because the bookstore will begin selling regalia on March 16 during the Seniors Moving on Day. Daniels stated that the bookstore can sell regalia anytime and there is even a special section in the bookstore of regalia. She then questioned if it would be possible for each college to post the official colors to their websites or even submit an email to the students with the appropriate colors.

It was determined that a new list will be devised with each college color listed. If there is a different color for a specific department, that department will be listed separately. Hincker stated that the official color list can be posted to the Commencement Website once it is finalized. Daniels requested a copy of the list in order to distribute it to potential graduates via listserv.

Murray questioned if students receive listserv emails in January concerning Commencement because several parents have called saying they have not received any information on Commencement. Daniels indicated that students have received information from the registrar’s office about registering for their degree and they have received an email about the ceremony time change.

O’Rourke mentioned that it was helpful having a January Commencement Committee meeting, and the committee should consider having a January meeting in the future. Henneke stated that the request will be noted.

Commencement Speakers
O’Rourke announced that David Calhoun, President of G.E. Transportation will be the University Commencement Speaker and Avery announced that Judith Bailey, President of Western Michigan University and Virginia Tech alumna, will be the Graduate School Commencement Speaker.

With no other business Brown moved to adjourn at 1:05 p.m.