Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 4, 2005
12:15 p.m.
President’s Boardroom, 210 Burruss Hall

Present: Ed Henneke, Chuck Payne for Jerry Allen, Roger Avery, Bud Brown, Emily Aleshire, Deborah Cook, Robyn Daniel, Ellington Graves, Mark Owczarski for Larry Hincker, Kim O’Rourke, Lyndell Price, Dixie Reaves, Dean Stauffer, Dan Taylor

Absent: Sumeet Bagai, Lay Nam Chang, Dan Eversole, Bill Green, Brian James, Brad Klein, Vinod Lohani, Diane Zahm

Guests: Susan Angle, John Beach, Vince Houston for Debra Duncan, Wendell Flinchum, Hunter Gresham, Richard McCoy, Patrick Casey, Margie Murray, April Myers, Eric Wininger

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

Approval of Minutes
A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes for the April 6, 2005, meeting and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Selection of student speakers for University Commencement Ceremony
Henneke provided some background. Prior to 1990, there was an invocation (now opening remarks), student speaker, and a benediction (now closing remarks). Historically, the invocation and benediction were given by a faculty member, and the class president was the only student speaker. Sometime around 1990, a request was made by the student officers to allow the students to become more involved with Commencement. The Commencement Committee decided to allow the opening and closing remarks to be given by students. It is uncertain as to whether or not the students were to be class officers, but currently the class officers are the speakers for Commencement. Recently a student questioned why the class officers are the student speakers for Commencement. Class officers are elected at the end of freshman year and remain as class officers until graduation. Therefore, the views and ideas of the students who voted may have changed over the years, and they may not have necessarily have voted for the same group of people.

Henneke requested that the committee think about the process to use in determining the student speakers for future Commencement ceremonies. Henneke asked for the committee to think about it, and a determination will be made at the first meeting in the fall.

NOTE ADDED AFTER MEETING:
Henneke communicated with Carol Nickerson who had worked with Chuck Kennedy’s committee back in the late 80’s when the University decided to do a major change to the Spring University Commencement Ceremony. The reason for the change was to improve student behavior during commencement. One major change was to remove the graduates from sitting in the stands and to put them on the field where they would be under sight of parents and other attendees. A second change recommended by the committee was to have students more involved in the ceremony by having more of them speak during the ceremony. Carol remembers that this committee spent long hours discussing various methods of selecting the student speakers, including a lottery among student leaders, essay or other contests, a special election, and so on. The Committee decided after considering the various pros and cons of a
large number of different possibilities, that the most expedient and fair method would be to use the only group of student leaders who were chosen via election by the entire graduating class and this group is the class officers.

Planning for the Spring Ceremony
Henneke reminded the committee that rehearsal will be held on Thursday, May 12, 2005, at 4:00 p.m. instead of 8:00 a.m. on Friday. This will allow more time for any last minute changes or setups.

Henneke indicated the need to schedule a walkthrough early next week for those organizing the processional. Beach indicated that this will not be a problem.

Beach then mentioned that the gate near the Merryman loading dock is blocked with construction equipment, and the route by which the honor students enter may need to be changed. Beach suggested that an alternate route would be to come down the steps going into the bottom of the Jamerson Center off of Spring Road in order to avoid the construction equipment. Reaves indicated that Jack Dudley needs to be ready to march in with the honor students by 5:30 p.m. Beach stated that Jack Dudley should be invited to participate in the walkthrough on Monday in order to show him where the new route will be.

Angle indicated that currently there have been requests for 60 special needs parking passes, but in the past around 300 have been given out. Taylor indicated that a total of 200 Cassell Coliseum parking passes were requested for the marshals and ushers, but they have also been informed that the parking area will only be reserved until 4:30 p.m. It was determined to rope off ½ of the coliseum lot and the first bay going into the south end zone lot, which will not interfere with the student lineup.

Owczarski informed the committee that starting Monday, May 9, 2005, he would coordinate getting any Commencement Information or announcements added to the Virginia Tech homepage.

Beach announced that the northwest gate will be totally blocked; both south gates will be open; and the northeast vehicle gate should be open.

Beach then indicated that the contractors will be working on Friday, and have been asked to shut down at 3:00 p.m.

Payne indicated that 4:00 p.m. for the rehearsal will be okay for the Color Guard. Casey informed the committee that he along with the Wind Symphony will not be able to attend the rehearsal because of the tour to area high schools.

Henneke reminded the committee that the next meeting will be the first Wednesday in September.

With no other business, Brown moved to adjourn at 12:45 p.m.