Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, September 7, 2005  
12:15 p.m.  
President’s Boardroom, 210 Burruss Hall

Present: Ed Henneke, Bill Stringer for Jerry Allen, Bud Brown, Deborah Cook, Russell Davis, Sam Easterling, Jerry Gibson, Mark Owczarski for Larry Hincker, Jean Kampe, Jerry Niles, Kim O’Rourke, Lyndell Price, Dixie Reaves, Dean Stauffer, Dan Taylor

Absent: Sumeet Bagai, Ellington Graves, Bill Green, Brian James, Brad Klein

Guests: Patrick Casey, Hunter Gresham, April Myers, Jennie Reilly, Laura Wedin, Eric Wininger

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

Henneke requested introductions be made so that everyone can become familiar with each other.

Approval of Minutes
O’Rourke moved that the minutes for the May 5, 2005, meeting be approved as written. With a second from Cook the minutes were approved unanimously.

Recap of Spring Ceremonies
Henneke asked if there were any problems that need to be brought to the attention of the committee or any good comments.

Reaves indicated that the physical plant workers did a great job setting up for the ceremony. Taylor mentioned that most of the problems for the ushers were created by the stadium construction. He also suggested getting signage for special needs seating for future ceremonies.

Henneke informed the committee that one letter of complaint was received concerned with the way guests were rushed out of the venue after the ceremony for Apparel, Housing and Resource Management, Human Development, and Teaching and Learning on Saturday. Henneke stated that the committee is free to step in during any part of Commencement, but he recommended that issues with Saturday ceremonies are better left to the departments. Henneke mentioned that the committee will try to help with scheduling venues for Saturday ceremonies in order to coordinate the proper venue with the number of students graduating. Owczarski questioned whether The Inn at Virginia Tech could provide additional venues for the Saturday ceremonies. Henneke indicated that the ballroom will seat around 800 people for dinner, which would make a good venue for a Saturday ceremony. Owczarski then questioned if Donaldson Brown would still be available for use as well. Gresham indicated that there is already a block put on all venues where Saturday ceremonies are held for the president’s office in order to determine what venues will be used for each ceremony. [Note: O’Rourke asked Margie Murray to reserve Latham Ballroom and any other suitable spaces at The Inn for Commencement.]
Gibson questioned if there was a problem with the distribution of programs at the University ceremony. Taylor indicated that the problem was that guests were using a different entrance than was anticipated, and the majority of the programs were at a different entrance. Once the issue was discovered, it was too crowded to get a vehicle to that entrance to deliver programs.

Selection of student speakers for University Commencement Ceremony
Henneke indicated that the discussion began last May about how it was determined that class officers would serve as the student speakers for the University ceremony. Henneke conferred with Carole Nickerson (a former Commencement Committee member from the 1980's and 1990's) on the history of how this was determined. He related that there was a threat in the late 1980's to eliminate the University Commencement ceremony altogether. In 1980's the ceremonies were held in the stadium, but the students did not sit on the field. Rather, the students sat in the bottom rows of the stands, below the guests. In the mid to late 1980's the graduates became very unruly. They acted as if they were just watching the event, but not part of it. The students would also bring in bottles of champagne and inundate faculty, thus ruining expensive regalia. The committee was established to determine what could be done to either improve the situation or discontinue the university ceremony altogether. The committee recommended that the graduates sit on the field. By doing this, the students became the center of attention and the behavior of the graduates improved. The committee also recommended that students participate as part of the stage party. The question then was how to determine which students would be given this honor. The committee considered several options as to the selection of the student speakers, which included a lottery, elections, and an essay competition. It was determined that the best approach would be to have speakers that are elected by the entire student class, and the class officers are the only students that are elected by the entire class. The committee then approved giving the honor of being a member of the stage party to the class officers.

Henneke indicated that there was a request last year to change the process by which the student speakers are selected. He then put this request before the committee to discuss. Gibson questioned how speakers are handled for the Graduate School ceremony. Henneke stated that the Graduate School functions similar to an individual college in that the dean has developed a method to select the graduate speakers. Henneke then indicated that the committee’s main focus is the University ceremony and not the individual ceremonies. Reaves then questioned if the students have a mechanism for gathering feedback from their peers on how the students should be selected. Davis indicated that in the past his class has used surveys via email to gather feedback for things such as the class ring design. Taylor suggested getting feedback from the students first before moving ahead with any decision on the selection of the student speakers. Davis agreed to send a survey to the student class in order to get feedback on how the student speakers should be chosen.

New Business
The Fall Commencement ceremony will be on December 16, 2005. The times are 11:00 a.m. for the University ceremony and 3:00 p.m. for the Graduate ceremony. It was also determined that since the stadium lights will be working, the Spring ceremonies (Friday) will be moved back to the original times.

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