COMMENCEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, November 5, 2003
12:15 p.m.
President's Boardroom, 210 Burruss Hall

Present: Ed Henneke, Bill Stringer for Jerry Allen, Bud Brown, Debbie Cook, John Beach for Bill Elvey, Jerry Gibson, Pat Goodrich, Bill Green, Larry Hincker, Brad Klein, Vinod Lohani, Kim O'Rourke, Dixie Reaves, Nicole Reynolds, Sherry Schofield-Tomschin, Rich Sorensen, Dean Stauffer, Dan Taylor

Absent: Theresa Cassino, Robyn Daniel, Brian James, Diane Zahm

Guests: Susan Angle, Hunter Gresham, Dave McKee, Lyndell Price, Jennie Reilly

Chairman Henneke called the meeting to order at 12:17 p.m.

Approval of Minutes – October 1, 2003
Moved by O'Rourke and seconded by Schofield-Tomschin, the minutes were approved as written.

Presentation of Diplomas at Spring Commencement
Henneke began the discussion by reporting that the Commission on Faculty Affairs is recommending that providing diplomas at spring commencement be discontinued. This would allow faculty to give longer and more detailed exams and have more time to get grades prepared.

Gibson responded that the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences would prefer that diplomas be presented at spring commencement, and is concerned that there would be a lot of complaints. Brown indicated that getting the diploma is a big deal for students. Gibson stated that the current apathy with regard to attending commencement would increase with the discontinuation of diplomas.

Sorensen felt that students or their parents greatly appreciate the diplomas. Reynolds, President of the Class of 2005, indicated that many students attend spring commencement because they know they will receive their diploma then. Why not process in the fall if diplomas will not be presented.

Green asked, why should we stop? We are one of the only schools left that presents spring diplomas. Virginia Tech has always provided diplomas at spring commencement according to Henneke, and he indicated that this issue comes up again every four to five years for discussion. Generally, the committee is strongly opposed.

The strongest argument used now to deter this change is that commencement is a student/parent function. What about fall commencement? Why do we not provide diplomas during the fall ceremony? Henneke indicated that the timeframe in the fall is much too close to the ceremony date, and that the Committee on Academic Support sets the academic calendar far in advance.

After discussion, the Commencement Committee membership unanimously agreed to oppose this suggestion. Even if the motion passed the Commission on Faculty Affairs, University Council would have to approve this decision as well.

Videotape of Commencement Ceremonies
At the October meeting, Goodrich announced that the Graduate School planned to have the fall ceremony videotaped, and indicated that she thought another cable broadcast was a
good idea. It was asked if the Bookstore could sell videotaped copies of the ceremonies at a minimal cost to those interested in purchasing a copy. Reilly would need to determine if an interpreter would be required on screen during the ceremony.

Reilly reported that an interpreter on screen would not be necessary, but that separate videos would have to be provided in an accessible format. She has the equipment and staff to do this, and the only additional cost would be $12-$15 per hour for transcribing for captions. Videos could be made available, but the same cost should apply for captioned or non-captioned copies.

It was suggested that we post the video on the website for downloading or pre-advertise the video for sale with diploma frames. Hincker noted that downloading a file as large as this would not be feasible. Another suggestion would be to have the ceremony available on CD instead of VHS format, but Reilly said that captioning is easier in VHS format. Another suggestion by Hincker was to have videos captioned on demand.

McKee asked if there was a market for this. He questioned the small market for the large amount of work to complete this endeavor. More discussion will follow on this subject, but there was no strong commitment by this committee to pursue this project at this time.

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Henneke announced that Bud Brown has agreed to be the speaker at the University ceremony.

Beach indicated that a rehearsal time would need to be set, and that a notation in the script should be made to indicate to students and their families that another ceremony would follow the university ceremony.

It was determined that rehearsal would be set for 4 p.m. on Thursday, December 18, for the Graduate and University ceremonies.

An accessible ramp will be provided for the stage, and is always provided at the fall ceremony.

Parking
It was reported that the entire lot across from the Coliseum is generally blocked for members of the stage party and handicap access—especially the first two bays. However, in the fall, very little of this space is being utilized—somewhat due to the fact that very few faculty process, and have not been provided with special parking in the past.

It was determined by this committee that the members of the stage party will be provided parking passes for the tennis court lot on the side of Cassell Coliseum—just off Washington Street. Faculty processing will be provided spaces across from the Coliseum if they plan to process.

More handicap parking will be available for those with handicap parking needs across from Cassell. Reilly indicated that it is easier to take those guests with accessibility needs directly across the street into Merryman. In addition, she stated that at the Fall 2002 ceremony, the entire circle of accessible seating was filled.
Gibson requested that this committee somehow urge faculty to participate in fall commencement. Henneke will send a note to faculty with a new message to request their presence on behalf of the students graduating.

Cook asked if there would be event staff on site—people who could assist in managing the flow of traffic. The president’s office will hire events staff, and will request that they assist with arrivals and departures from the Coliseum. It is suggested that wording be placed in the script asking guests to depart through certain gates.

Gibson asked if we had an emergency plan or emergency personnel present should they be necessary. Henneke stated that this committee does not have a good plan. It was suggested that there be a central desk or location where assistance could be sought in an emergency situation.

Beach indicated that since the Georgia Tech game, an emergency plan was made for the stadium, but wasn’t sure about Cassell. He also stated that Cassell is a different venue, and there would be problems evacuating students from the floor. Basically, they would have to go out through the tunnel and would have trouble getting off the floor to reach the ambulatories.

It was also suggested that due to the length of the ceremony, that the readers needed some sort of pacing scheme to keep the process moving. This will be discussed further as necessary.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:01 p.m.