

University Commencement Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 7, 2015
12:15 p.m.
President's Board Room, 210 Burruss Hall

Present: Dan Taylor (chair), Janice Austin, Candi Clemenz, Andrew Ellis, Bernice Hausman, Pj Johnston, Lance Jones, Joseph Millett, Kim O'Rourke, Steve Sheetz, Michael Stowe, Martha Sullivan, Raven Weaver, Pengtao Yue, Diane Zahm

Absent: Luke Carroll, Patrick Finn, Rebecca Funk, Jacqueline Nottingham (with notice), Elena Serrano, Anthony Watson (with notice)

Guests: Johni Amos, Ken Belcher, Jonathan Caldwell, Bo Frazier, Captain Vince Houston, David McKee, Mike Mulhare, Margie Murray, April Myers, Rick Sparks, Pam Vickers, Laura Wedin

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

Announcement of Approval of May 6, 2015, minutes

Taylor announced that the minutes of May 6, 2015, have been voted on and approved electronically.

Planning for Fall ceremonies

An announcement was made that Rhino Sports and Entertainment Services will be the new contracted event staff for Commencement. Captain Houston indicated that Andrew Ward will be the contact for Rhino Sports and Entertainment Services. The Virginia Tech Police Department, in conjunction with Emergency Management, will brief the new event staff and what is expected for Commencement.

Hausman indicated that she may not be able to participate as the Commencement Marshal during the fall ceremonies, and she will definitely not be able to participate in the spring ceremonies. A suggestion was made to ask the current Faculty Senate president, Rami Dalloul, to fill in for Dr. Hausman. Dr. Housman indicated that she would contact Rami Dalloul about replacing her.

Vickers indicated that Athletics is redoing the ambulatory area in the coliseum. Vickers will check it out prior to the November meeting and report back if there are any issues.

McKee introduced John Caldwell, who will be coordinating the music for the Commencement ceremonies.

Introductions

Introductions were made so that everyone could become familiar with each other.

Recap of Spring Ceremonies

Zahm informed the committee that the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad has a new person in charge and this person asked the ushers to move the snacks out of the first aid station in the south stands because they wanted to keep the first aid stations clear for any emergency. Zahm indicated that the main issues were that they were not informed about this change until the start of the ceremony, and the refreshments were moved to the concourse area, which made everything accessible to all Commencement guests in the South End Zone. Taylor stated that a suitable location will be found for the refreshments for next year. Zham indicated the she would contact the rescue squad about first aid station use.

Taylor indicated that there is a potential in the near future of approximately 1,000 more graduates to place, so there will be a need to reserve additional overflow seating in the stands each year as well as additional seats on the field. Murray indicated that additional chairs can be added to the field, which may help prevent having to use the stands. Hausman suggested that communication be sent out to the graduates prior to the ceremony stating that there is a possibility that they could be redirected to the stands. Wedin stated that this information can be sent out via the class listserv. Since there are designated seating areas for each college, a suggestion was made to have a rotation schedule for seating each college if the stands are going to be used each year so that not the same college has graduates sitting in the stands every year.

Taylor indicated that the stage at the University ceremony was rather crowded and movement was restricted due to the placement of the chairs and the podium. A suggestion was made to move all rows back a couple of feet in order to give more room between the front row and the podium. There is enough room on the stage to do this.

There was also a concern with wheelchair platforms on the west side. Taylor indicated that one of the two platforms was not initially available. It is important to make sure that both platforms are available next year.

Taylor suggested opening the south gate (staffed with security and an elevator operator) for wheelchair/impaired mobility individuals and their guests. It didn't appear that the south stands accessible seating was utilized. Zahm indicated that there only needs to be access to the South End Zone elevators for those needing accessible seating. The event staff was not allowing accessible guests to use those elevators in order to access the ambulatory seating.

A suggestion was made to have the Color Guard staging area in the press room located in the south end zone. This will allow for the stage party to assemble in the tunnel until the brass fanfare is complete.

Taylor suggested moving the official start time of the ceremony to 8:30 a.m. In spring 2015, Pomp and Circumstance began at 8:50 a.m. and took approximately 30 minutes for the entire processional. Starting the processional at 8:30 a.m. will allow for the ceremony to begin at close to 9:00 a.m. as intended. Hausman suggested that the only time that should be communicated with the public is the start of the procession.

Captain Houston indicated that there were still major traffic flow issues because of university employees trying to arrive at work the same time guests were arriving for the University ceremony even though the opening of the university was delayed until 10:00 a.m. Houston indicated that the campus infrastructure is not set up to handle that many people trying to enter campus at the same time. Many ideas were proposed: opening the university at noon or closing entirely, designating different streets for employees and Commencement guests to enter campus. Strategies for communication the decision and rational to staff and faculty were discussed. Options will continue to be explored.

MGySgt Jones asked if a parking garage would be open to Commencement guests. He would like to have the ROTCPs and the Commandant send instructions to Commissioning ceremony guests to park in that facility. Frazier indicated that he could not do that with the North End Center parking garage, but the Perry Street parking garage could possibly be used for this purpose. This will help reduce some traffic because those guests will be here all day with various ceremonies located on campus.

Announcements

Taylor announced that the Graduate School Spring ceremony will move to Thursday starting in May 2016. The actual time of the ceremony is to be determined. [Note: The time was subsequently set at 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.] O'Rourke also suggested publicizing this change as soon as possible so the achievement ceremonies that are held on Thursday can be scheduled around the Graduate School ceremony. Belcher indicated that the dorms cannot be ready for guests until 7:00 p.m. on Thursday evening. Graduate School ceremony guests could attend the ceremony and then check in to a dorm room after the ceremony. Austin indicated that Graduate School has reviewed all possible concerns with having the ceremony on Thursday, and it is still more beneficial to have it on Thursday versus Friday afternoon.

With no other business, Zahm moved to adjourn at 1:13 p.m.