

# Minutes of the Commencement Committee Meeting

**Date:** Wednesday, October 2, 2024

**Time:** 12:00 – 1:00 PM

**Location:** Zoom

## Attendees:

Ciji Good, Diane Zahm, Rebecca Jones, Jennifer Cleveland, Milford Palmer, Keith Thompson, Stewart Scales, Jessie Richards, Kim O'Rourke, Pascha Gerni, Monica Kimbrell, Barbara Hoopes, Ginny Wagg, Jeanette Biczel, Brittany Schulz, Jodie Brinkmann, Anthony Watson, John Torget, Vito Scarola, Brittany Lee, Casey Underwood, Abby Carlson, Michelle Seref, Marlana Lester, Andrew Marinik, Dixie Watts Dalton, Eryn Giegel

**Invited Guest:** Erin Hand

## Called to Order:

Diane Zahm called the meeting to order at 12:02 PM.

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## Agenda Items

### Introduction of Members

Each attendee introduced themselves and shared their connection to the committee.

### Debrief from Spring Commencement Ceremonies

- **Weather Checks:** Suggestion using phone calls for weather checks instead of in-person visits as it is a long trip from the field to the top of the stadium. While that this can be a discussion moving forward, often different colleges request the communications in different ways – some want face to face vs call/text.
- **Coordination:** Moving forward for spring commencement each college will have a specific SE coordinator. Ciji Good and Jessie Richards will lead overall planning.
- **Stadium Construction:** Regarding staging logistics given the completion of construction at Lane is scheduled to happen this spring it is uncertain if they will still have the processional from the north end or will it be moved to the south end tunnel. A proposal to have them begin at a midpoint in student seating as was done for the exit last year was discussed.
- **Feedback on NOVA Commencement:** Positive feedback received from NOVA students regarding last year's ceremony. George Mason University works very well for current crowd size. Confirmed that the Innovation Campus would not be large enough to accommodate the May ceremony.
- **FYI:** They do not have a formal commencement in the fall, instead they have a reception.
- **Inclusivity:** Discussion regarding the need for inclusivity for grad students in NOVA with hopes to accommodate students wishing to participate in commencement ceremonies in Blacksburg. Previous arrangements were successful; however, recent changes have created logistical challenges. Graduate students are now organized by individual colleges, leading to ceremonies not being held on a single day. NOVA is unable to send multiple groups on different days due to financial constraints. Participation in these ceremonies is significant for many students, as it may be their only opportunity to visit the main campus.

## Work Plan for Academic Year

- **Goals:**
  - Goal 1 - Prepare for and manage Fall '24 and Spring '25 commencement ceremonies.
  - Goal 2 - Plan for future commencement ceremonies specifically focusing on limitations that growth places on available facilities within the days/times available; providing a meaningful commencement experience that meets the needs of graduates; addresses the needs of colleges, schools, departments, and programs; takes advantage of available technologies as opportunities to enhance the commencement experience both on campus and remotely.
  - Goal 3 - Collaborate with the Commission on Faculty Affairs and other governance bodies to achieve these goals.
  - Work Plan will be approved/submitted without objection.
- **For Future Consideration:** Suggestion was made to explore the North American Association of Commencement Officers (NAACO) for new ideas.
- **Housing for Students/Families:** Dormitory housing will be provided starting Thursday night of commencement.

## Committee Member Responsibilities

- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Information for new faculty representatives and reminder for returning reps, you are tasked with finding volunteers (ushers and marshals) for ceremonies. A volunteer list is needed by December 1, with requests going out in late October.

## Fall Commencement Details

- **Date:** Friday, December 20, 2024.
- **Ceremony Schedule:**
  - 10:30 AM: Undergraduate Ceremony
  - 2:30 PM: Graduate Ceremony
- **Volunteer Needs:** Similar volunteer numbers are required as last year.

## Commencement Speakers

- There is a shift from student suggestions to a leadership-coordinated approach for selecting speakers. A list was submitted to the president's office.
- The process for selecting student speakers includes advance submissions and peer reviews.

## Further Business

- No additional business was raised.

## Adjournment:

Diane Zahm adjourned the meeting at 12:32 PM without objection.

## Next Meeting:

Scheduled for Wednesday, November 6, 2024, at Noon.

