

MINUTES

Commencement Committee Wednesday, November 5, 2025 Noon – 1 p.m. Zoom

Present: Diane Zahm (presiding), Amy Rasor, Janice Austin, Jeanette Biczal, Jennifer Cleveland, Jennifer Thomas, Dixie Dalton, Karl Rice, Keith Thompson, Kim O'Rourke, Michael Stowe, Monica Kimbrell, Pascha Gerni, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower

Absent with Notice: Vito Scarola

Absent: Manuka Bhatiani, Lance Jones, Justin Lemkul, Kayla Moten, Stewart Scales, Michelle Seref, Anthony Watson, James Weger

Guests: Jessie Richards, Jennifer Skaggs, Annie McCallum, Erin Hand, Brittany Schulz, Cara Walters, Ginny Wagg, Joseph Cooley, Joy Manning, Milford Palmer, Clayton Oliver, Eryn Giegel, Holly Wessel

Diane Zahm called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m. A quorum was present.

1. Announcement of approval and posting of minutes of 10/8/25

Diane Zahm noted that minutes from the Committee's previous meeting, 10/8/25, were approved electronically and can be publicly accessed on the Governance Website: governance.vt.edu

2. Fall Commencement Draft Timeline Review

Diane Zahm turned the meeting over to Jessie Richards from Special Events to share the draft timeline for ceremonies. It was confirmed that doors at Cassell will open for both graduates and the public at 9 a.m. Diane Zahm noted that volunteers will need to arrive, be briefed, and in place prior to doors opening. Both University and Graduate School ceremonies will be held on Friday, December 19, 2025. The university ceremony will begin at 10:30 a.m. and the graduate school ceremony will begin at 2:30 p.m.

3. Commencement Speakers Update

It has not yet been announced publicly, but it has been confirmed that Cyril Clarke will be the keynote speaker for university commencement. This will be announced publicly soon. Eryn Giegel and Janice Austin confirmed that student speakers for university and graduate school ceremonies, respectively, will be announced soon as well.

4. Spring Ceremonies Schedule

The spring commencement schedule was published online and publicized on October 24, 2025 and is as follows:

- Saturday, May 9
 - 9 a.m.-noon Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine at the Jefferson Center in Roanoke

- Wednesday, May 13
 - 3-5 p.m. Graduate School (Ph.D. and interdisciplinary graduate education programs only) in Cassell Coliseum
 - 6-8 p.m. Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (MPH, MS, and bachelor's of science in public health) in the Center for the Arts
- Thursday, May 14
 - 8:30-10:30 a.m. College of Architecture, Arts, and Design in Cassell Coliseum
 - Noon-2p.m. Pamplin College of Business Ceremony One in Lane Stadium
 - 3-4:30 p.m. College of Natural Resources and Environment in Burruss Hall
 - 4-6 p.m. Pamplin College of Business Ceremony Two in Lane Stadium
 - 7:30-9:30 p.m. College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in Lane Stadium
- Friday, May 15
 - 8:30 a.m. University Commencement in Lane Stadium
 - 12:30-2:30 p.m. College of Science Ceremony One in Cassell Coliseum
 - 4-6 p.m. College of Science Ceremony Two in Cassell Coliseum
 - 7-9 p.m. Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) Ceremony in the Center for the Arts
 - 7:30-9:30 p.m. Corps of Cadets Graduation and Joint Commissioning Ceremony in Cassell Coliseum
- Saturday, May 16
 - 8-10 a.m. College of Engineering Undergraduate Ceremony One in Cassell Coliseum
 - 8:30-9:30 a.m. College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Ceremony One in Burruss Hall
 - 10:45-11:45 a.m. College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Ceremony Two in Burruss Hall
 - Noon-2 p.m. College of Engineering Undergraduate Ceremony Two in Cassell Coliseum
 - 12:30-1:30 p.m. College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Ceremony Three in Burruss Hall
 - 2:45-3:45 p.m. College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Ceremony Four in Burruss Hall
 - 4-6 p.m. College of Engineering Undergraduate Ceremony Three in Cassell Coliseum

- 7:30-9:30 p.m. College of Engineering Master's Ceremony Four in Cassell Coliseum
- Sunday, May 17
 - 1-3 p.m. D.C. Area Graduate School Ceremony in the Center for the Arts at George Mason University

5. Volunteer Reminders

Diane Zahm announced that the call for volunteers for both university and graduate ceremonies has gone out from her office. Everyone should ensure they are completing the forms correctly and placing people in the appropriate locations for each ceremony/section. This is a Google Doc that has been shared with everyone on the Commencement Committee as well as all college contacts for commencement. All users with access can edit the document. Jessie Richards suggested that adding shift times to the document would be helpful for clarity of scheduling. The following information and needs have been shared with the colleges:

- University Ceremony
 - One marshal with regalia to lead graduates to the podium
 - One marshal - with or without regalia - to assist with other aspects of the ceremonies, for example, seating graduates in advance of the ceremony and directing graduates back to their seats during the ceremonies. Regalia is welcomed, but will not be required for this marshal.
 - One escort without regalia to assist with ADA services.
- Graduate Ceremony
 - One escort without regalia to assist with ADA services.
- Names and contact information for all those assisting with ceremonies will be due by December 1.

6. Special Events/Implementation Team Update(s)

No updates currently from Special Events or Implementation. Everything is on track as we get the ball rolling for logistics. Implementation Team is currently meeting bi-weekly on Tuesdays from now until December 16.

7. Further Business

Joseph Cooley (ADA) raised questions about changes or edits to the website as well as rumors that the Merryman entrance would not be used as an ADA entrance this year. He requested that the website be clear that the public should direct questions to ADA and not SSD as SSD is for students. Jessie Richards confirmed that both Washington Street and Merryman entrances remained the planned ADA-accessible entrances. Cara Walters (Athletics) added that there will be no issue for ADA guests to continue having access through Merryman as in past years. Milford Palmer (VTPD) confirmed that, as in past years, they will have an officer assigned to the Merryman entrance. Jessie Richards confirmed that ADA and SSD are being asked to review the website again to ensure that all information – especially any link which navigates away from the main commencement site – is accurate.

Kim O'Rourke reported that Title II accessibility requirements will apply to websites and live-streams and noted the extensive specifications involved. Annie McCallum shared that the communications team has been working diligently toward this goal for quite some time and the commencement site is nearly complete. Work continues on live-stream accessibility. Kim O'Rourke emphasized the complexity of ensuring accurate descriptive content for viewers with visual impairments during live-

streams and will follow up with Annie. Attendees were asked to direct any questions or concerns regarding accessibility to Annie McCallum and Jessie Richards.

Next Committee meeting will be held Wednesday, December 3, 2025.

8. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12;19 p.m.