

MINUTES

Commencement Committee Meeting Wednesday, October 8, 2025 12:00 p.m. Zoom

Present: Diane Zahm (presiding), Amy Rasor, Anthony Watson, Janice Austin, Jennifer Cleveland, Justin Lemkul, Karl Rice, Keith Thompson, Monica Kimbrell, Pascha Gerni, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, Stewart Scales, Nahum Arav, Manuka Bhatiani, Dixie Watts Dalton

Absent with Notice: Michelle Seref, Vito Scarola

Absent: Kayla Moten, Lance Jones, Kim O'Rourke, Jeanette Biczal, Michael Stowe, Jennifer Thomas, James Weger

Guests: John Torget, Jessie Richards, Erin Hand, Andrew Marinik, Brittany Lee, Ginny Wagg, Jennifer Skaggs, John Jackson, Joy Manning, Milford Palmer, Rebecca Jones, Eryn Giegel, Annie McCallum, Lisha Henshaw

Diane Zahm called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

1. Announcement of approval and posting of minutes of 4/2/25 meeting.

Diane Zahm noted that minutes from the Committee's previous meeting, 4/2/25, were approved electronically and can be publicly accessed on the Governance Website: governance.vt.edu

2. Introduction of Members

All committee members and invited guests in attendance introduced themselves to the group and shared their role with the university as well as within the committee.

3. Work Plan for Academic Year

The committee reviewed last year's goals and requested any updates. The Commencement Committee reports to the Commission on Faculty Affairs. Chair Diane Zahm called for questions or comments. With no questions or concerns raised, Diane Zahm called for a vote. A motion to adopt the work plan was made by Nahum Arav and seconded by Eryn Giegel. There was no opposition or abstention. The work plan was adopted unanimously.

4. Spring Commencement Ceremonies Debrief

Diane Zahm noted that the commencement ceremonies went extremely well overall, particularly the university ceremony, and welcomed any thoughts or suggestions for improvement.

Nahum Arav expressed concern that participating in commencement while wearing regalia created uncomfortable and "inhumane" conditions, as faculty were crowded into an underground hallway that was hot and poorly ventilated.

Justin Lemkul commented on issues from the previous year's graduate commencement, including inconsistent instructions given at the entrance and general confusion among students about ceremony procedures. He suggested providing clear, concise instructions—such as a "Five Things to

Know” or “Ten Things to Know” list—tailored for university, college, and graduate school ceremonies. He also raised concerns about accessibility, noting that one student reported issues with ADA compliance and that some staff were unsure how to assist individuals with mobility challenges.

Diane Zahm added that there was some confusion regarding the marshal’s role in handling the mace (retrieval post-ceremony for the most part).

Diane Zahm emphasized the need to establish a dress code or otherwise ensure that participants not involved with official photography are appropriately presented, particularly for the livestream. She further expressed interest in collaborating with Eryn Giegel earlier in the process to coordinate speeches.

Jenn Cleveland commended how smoothly the transition to Cassell Coliseum from Lane Stadium was managed when a venue change became necessary for the College of Science ceremonies due to weather. Diane Zahm agreed, noting that everyone involved should be commended for handling the change as effectively as possible under the circumstances.

5. Fall Commencement Details

- Date: Friday, December 19, 2025
- Ceremony Schedule:
 - 10:30 AM: Undergraduate Ceremony
 - 2:30 PM: Graduate Ceremony

6. Review Committee Responsibilities

Diane Zahm led a discussion on volunteer recruitment for the fall ceremonies. Each college is responsible for providing three volunteers per ceremony, with at least one volunteer in academic regalia. Diane Zahm asked Janice Austin how many volunteers were needed for the graduate ceremony. Janice Austin responded that while floor marshals are not required for the graduate ceremony, volunteers are needed to assist with ADA accommodations. For the university ceremony, each college should provide two volunteers for floor assistance and one volunteer for ADA support. Contact information, including cell phone numbers, will be requested from all volunteers; however, this information will not be shared publicly.

7. Timeframes and Deadlines

- Call for Volunteers – Call will go out from the office of Diane Zahm to all Colleges for volunteers by the end of October. This will include a shared document for collection of pertinent volunteer information.
- Volunteer Information – Colleges should input the names and contact information of their volunteers on the shared document by December 1.

8. Commencement Speakers

There were no updates at this time. Diane Zahm noted that the President’s Office and the President make the final selection for commencement speakers, but anyone may submit a nomination. While nominations are typically requested from student members of the committee, nominations from any source are welcome. She emphasized that for the spring ceremony, earlier submissions are preferred, and this year’s spring speaker would be the newly elected governor. Diane Zahm invited suggestions for the fall ceremony to share with the President’s Office. Kim O’Rourke asked whether the tradition of selecting a faculty member for the fall ceremony would continue. Diane Zahm confirmed that this tradition would be maintained, with the goal of having the nominee identified by

students, though nominations from others are also encouraged to ensure consideration for both fall and spring ceremonies.

9. Special Events/Implementation Team Update(s)

No updates. Standing agenda item. There is a separate committee/team that will meet for that and we will share that information here as needed.

10. Further Business

- Next Committee meeting will be held Wednesday, November 5, 2025.

11. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:25 p.m.