

The Committee on Ceremonial Occasions

A Standing Committee of the Faculty Senate
Queensborough Community College
The City University of New York

Holly O’Donnell
Shannon Kincaid
Co-Chairs/Co-Secretaries

August 11, 2008

To: Professor Devin McKay,
Academic Steering Committee

From: Holly O’Donnell and Shannon Kincaid, Co-Chairs and Co-Secretaries
Committee on Ceremonial Occasions (COCO)

Re: 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Committee on Ceremonial Occasions

Committee on Ceremonial Occasions – Meetings and Membership

The Committee on Ceremonial Occasions held official meetings four times during the 2005-2006 academic year (11/7/08, 12/12/08, 2/19/08, and 5/8/08). We also had numerous informal conversations (both in person and via e-mail) on subjects relating to committee business.

The 2005-2006 Committee was composed of the following members:

<u>Committee Member</u>	<u>Department</u>
Shannon Kincaid, Co-Chair/Co-Secretary	Social Sciences
Holly O’Donnell, Co-Chair/Co-Secretary	Basic Skills
Laura Sabani	Foreign Languages and Literatures

The representative from the Student Government Association was Melissa Dindial.

The Administration was represented by Millie Conte, Executive Assistant to the President, and Ellen F. Hartigan, Vice President for Student Affairs, was the Presidential Designee to the committee.

2. Committee on Ceremonial Occasions – 2007-2007 Activities Summary

This was again a transitional year for the Committee on Ceremonial Occasions. Prior to the 2006-2007 Academic Year, the committee had been charged with the “planning and implementation” of commencement. However, as of the Fall Semester in 2005, the Academic Senate voted to change the by-laws charge of the committee. Instead of planning and implementing the ceremony, the committee now functions primarily as an advisory body, with the task of implementation now borne by the President’s office and the Department for Student Affairs. Starting with the 2006-2007 academic year, the Senate also voted to reduce the number of committee members from six to three.

However, the change in the bylaws charge of the committee failed to note which ceremonies were to fall under the committee’s advisory and consultative role. After meeting with the Senate Parliamentarian in 2007, it was decided that it was important to identify at least graduation as an “official” college ceremony. Yet this was a controversial issue for some, and there was much discussion among the committee members, officials of the Senate, various faculty members (including department chairpersons), and administration. Some wanted the listing of official college ceremonies to include additional events (Honors Convocation, Freshman Orientations, New Faculty Orientation, etc.), while others were concerned about the potential implications of such a resolution.

Given the new bylaws charge and the history of the committee and its traditional role in graduation, the committee decided that one its primary goals ought to be the creation of an annual observation report for the previous year’s graduation ceremony. This report should be presented to the administration during the committee’s first meeting of each academic year, as well as be posted on the college website for review and suggestions by the college community. As we indicated in last year’s report,

“...the most fruitful role for the committee members on graduation day would be that of commencement ‘observers.’ Having the opportunity the opportunity to observe the students, faculty, staff, and under-the-tent staging areas would permit committee members to take notice of particular aspects of the event that might require future modification; it would also allow them to be available to assist with any problems or concerns that might arise”

In order to fulfill these obligations, members were assigned various locations at various times before, during, and after the ceremony. They were to record their observations, discuss them with other committee members at a later date, and compile a report that contained the most significant observations, listed potential areas for improvement, and provide details to any support roles they served during the course of the ceremony.

As in the previous, the first two meetings of the committee were focused primarily on discussions of the observation report and its suggestions. These included:

1. Staging Area
2. Faculty Gauntlet

3. Processional
4. Length of Ceremony
5. Seating, Staging, and Guest Assistance
6. Potential Elimination of Keynote Speaker
7. Music, Processional, and Recessional
8. Balloons and Unapproved Outside Vendors
9. Recognition for Staff Involvement

In the February meeting, we discussed in further detail the music and processional (as well as cost of ceremony). We also discussed potential changes to the 2008 commencement guide, including 1) The addition of a reminder to graduates that family members and children are not allowed on the stage during the presentation of diplomas and 2), a disclaimer stating that vendors outside college property are not approved by the college, and directing students and families to officially licensed vendors on college grounds. These recommendations were due to concerns of potential legal liability issues.

Another important topic of discussion concerned the size of the tent, its placement, and the arrangement of seating, as well as the potential danger of leaving unattended stacks of chairs available for guests. Everyone agreed that while the tent adds enormous cost to the ceremony (and that the Auxiliary Budget Allocation continues to cover only about half of the cost of the graduation itself), it is an essential part of the ceremony due to the shelter it provides, and sense of ceremony that would be lacking sitting in an open field. Returning the ceremony to the Quad is one option, but the ceremony itself has grown so large in recent years as to make this unfeasible.

Several cost-cutting suggestions were considered and eventually rejected. Purchasing the tent and/or chairs would serve as a long-term cost-saving measure. But, the availability and viability of storage on campus is a major concern.

The final meeting was an emergency meeting called at the request of the President. As reported by Millie Conte, Executive Assistant to President Marti, there was an issue regarding the scheduling of Commencement 2009. Although commencement traditionally takes place on the last Friday in May or the first Friday in June (depending upon the end of the finals period). However, 2009 presented a problem due to the fact that the Jewish Holiday of Shavuot takes place on Friday, May 29, 2009. Because there may be graduates, faculty, and staff who celebrate this holiday, the President expressed a desire to consider moving the ceremony from its traditionally scheduled date. What follows is the text of the discussion from the minutes of the May 8, 2008 meeting:

EA Conte explained that there was an issue regarding the scheduling of Commencement 2009 and asked if the committee could spend some time discussing it. Although Commencement traditionally takes place on the last Friday in May or the first Friday in June, 2009 is going to present a problem due to the fact that the Jewish holiday of Shavuot takes place on Friday, May 29, 2009. Because there may be graduates, faculty, and staff who celebrate this holiday, EA Conte said that she had been brainstorming

other possibilities; some of these possibilities included Saturday, May 30, Sunday, May 31, Monday, June 1, or Friday, June 5. Co-chairs Kincaid and O'Donnell expressed concern about moving commencement up one week to Friday, June 5 because of its implications on annual leave; this would also likely have a negative effect on faculty attendance. Everyone present also expressed concern that faculty turnout could be low if graduation was held on a weekend and EA Conte also advised that staffing the event (Buildings and Grounds staff members, ushers, photographer, sound technicians, the Royal Brass, etc.) could also be a challenge. Ms. Dindial, the committee's student representative, advised that a Sunday ceremony would be especially convenient for students and their families who might otherwise have to take off from work in order to attend a weekday commencement. In some cases, she said, this means lost wages. The rest of the committee agreed that the ability of the graduates to attend has to be of primary importance when selecting a date.

After the meeting, there was much discussion among the members of the committee as they solicited responses and advice from fellow faculty, staff members, and students. Committee members were taken by surprise at the level of response to changing the date. Committee members responded by noting that no official change had yet been made in the date of ceremony and that our response to the Administration's request was limited to recommending to the President that he discuss this matter before the Academic Senate.

The final meeting of the year concluded with a summary of logistical plans for the ceremony, and a review of faculty volunteer duties, as well as the placement of Committee observers. Commencement was held on Friday, June 1st, 2008.

3. Committee on Ceremonial Occasions – 2008-2009 Committee Membership

The 2006-2007 Committee members, as designated by Academic Senate's Committee on Committees (Mike Cesarano, Chair) are:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Department</u>
Margot Edlin	Basic Educational Skills
Vicky Kasomenakis	Business
Cristina Suzuki	Mathematics

4. Committee on Ceremonial Occasions - Recommendations

After consulting with various members of the faculty, staff, and administration at the college, we have included the following excerpts from the Commencement 2008 Observation Report:

Evaluation and Summary of Recommendations

Registration

- Need extra cards at tables
- Ensure restrooms are properly cleaned and stocked
- Provide bobbi-pins as necessary
- Restrict Science Lobby to “Graduates Only”
- Improved Sanitation in Science Courtyard
- Updating electric signage at entry to Science Courtyard
- Marshals should report earlier

Signage and Information

- Information table should be placed in front of the Administration Building
- Improved signage on campus (directing students and guests to proper locations)

Vendors

- Consider liability and licensing of unauthorized vendors
- Expand college-approved vending services

Faculty

- There should be additional support from the regalia rental company with regards to distribution of caps and gowns

The Ceremony

- No joggers should be allowed on the track during the ceremony!
- Improved efficiency in guest seating
- Sound problems (some straining to hear names, guests outside of tent could not hear)
- Extra regalia should be provided for dignitaries who arrive at the last minute.

Degree Conferral

- Ensure proper microphone operation
- Better coordination between platform party and the reader
- DO NOT have AAS and Certificate degree students cut in front of the stage

Alma Mater

- Attempts should be made to better emphasize the relationship between the Alma Mater and the Mission of the College

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Shannon Kincaid, Prof. Holly O’Donnell
Co-Chairpersons
Co-Secretaries/Committee on Ceremonial Occasions
2007-2008