Dear Faculty and Staff,

As you know, graduation is one of the most cherished moments for our students and their families, and serves as a celebration of the achievements of our entire community. Your efforts in making graduation possible is greatly appreciated.

Starting last spring, I engaged a number of constituencies, including the Faculty Senate, the President, various administrative offices, and facilities management to review our current commencement practices and suggest alternative practices. There are several compelling reasons for looking at changing our current graduation activities:

- With the increase in the number of PhD graduates, our current construct of holding a PhD Hooding Ceremony breakfast prior to Commencement no longer works. There are no venues on campus to continue the tradition of a sit-down breakfast ceremony, and the time available for the Hooding Ceremony prior to the regular Commencement Ceremony is no longer sufficient. As a result of both the timing and venue constraints, the PhD Hooding Ceremony has become rushed and cramped, making the ceremony more impersonal than desired.

- As both graduate and undergraduate participation in Commencement has grown, we have struggled to maintain our traditional ceremony within time limits that make sense. Commencement now routinely takes between 2.5 the 3 hours to complete.

- Finally, as demonstrated this past spring, in the event of inclement weather, there is no indoor venue on campus large enough to house our current commencement ceremony without significantly limiting the number of family members who can attend the event.

Based on these discussions, starting this fall we will split our commencement activities into separate graduate and undergraduate graduation ceremonies. The undergraduate ceremony will take place, as usual, starting at 9:30 am on Friday, December 18. The graduate (Masters and Doctoral) ceremony will take place starting at 4:00 pm on Thursday, December 17. Plans for faculty attendance at each ceremony were discussed with the Faculty Senate in the spring. Please see the FAQ below for those and other details.

Thanks…

Tom
Commencement FAQ

Why not create separate ceremonies for each college rather than split into BS and MS+PhD ceremonies?

Undergraduate students have expressed a preference of seeing classmates from departments outside of their college graduate.

Splitting via colleges would require the institution to create, manage and facilitate three separate ceremonies. There are limited on-campus venues for holding concurrent ceremonies, timing constraints for holding sequential ceremonies, and limit support for managing three separate ceremonies.

What will the Graduate Commencement Ceremony look like?

The graduate commencement ceremony will be a full ceremony that includes participation of the administration (President, Provost, etc.) and the CSM Board. The Ceremony will include a keynote speaker, a student speaker (PhD graduate), and the awarding of the “Rath Award” for the most impactful PhD research conducted by a PhD graduate. This award will be open to all PhD graduates and determined through a process organized by the VPRTT’s Office.

Will there still be a Hooding Ceremony?

No, the hooding of PhD candidates will be re-integrated back into the graduate Commencement Ceremony.

As a Faculty Member, in which ceremony do I need to participate?

Faculty who are advising PhD graduates attending the ceremony will be asked to participate in the graduate ceremony. For the undergraduate ceremony, we will reduce the number of faculty who participate to 50.

Why not hold the Graduate Commencement Ceremony sometime on Friday, either before or after the Undergraduate Ceremony?

The size of each ceremony, BS and MS+PHD, dictates that the only on-campus venue available is Lockridge Arena. Due to RMAC commitments, this venue must be vacated no later than 2 pm on the Friday of Fall commencement. So, an afternoon ceremony is not possible. Scheduling two morning ceremonies is not practical as this would require one of the ceremonies to begin at a very early hour (i.e., 7 am or earlier).

We also explored the possibility of holding the undergraduate and graduate ceremonies simultaneously in two separate venues. In this model, graduate commencement would be held in Bunker Auditorium while the undergraduate ceremony took place in Lockridge Arena. Bunker, however, is limited in size and provides no room for growth in the number of graduates, and
limited seating for families. In addition, there were concerns about staffing two events simultaneously and about traffic flow and control.

**Aren’t there final examinations scheduled that conflict with the Graduate Commencement Ceremony?**

Yes, the Graduate Commencement Ceremony conflicts with the final two, final examination periods. Actual conflicts, however, should be limited to those students completing coursework in their final semester. It is unlikely that these will be thesis-based students, but rather conflicts will be limited to MS-NT students. In reviewing the examination schedules and graduation participant list for all of last year, this conflict would have affected one MS-NT student and one Department Head. So, we anticipate that the number of actual conflicts will be low, and we will ask faculty for some flexibility in managing potential conflicts.

Moving forward, once the Registrar publishes the final examination schedule (immediately after census), OGS will compare the final examination schedule with the enrollment schedule for candidates who have applied for graduate and indicated they are interested in participating in Commencement. For the small number of candidates for which there are conflicts, OGS will ask instructors to provide some flexibility to these candidates so that they may complete their final examinations and participate in commencement.

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