September 6, 2013

MEMORANDUM

To: University Deans

From: Russell K. Dean
Senior Associate Provost

Subject: Guidelines for Graduates Participating in Main Campus Commencement Ceremonies in May

A number of deans' offices have contacted the Provost's Office regarding the permissibility of projected August graduates participating (walking across the stage) in May Commencement ceremonies. The essential reason for considering this possibility is that many of our August graduates leave Morgantown shortly after May graduation and complete their final degree requirements from a distance. Most do not travel back to Morgantown for the December Convocation Ceremony. Thus, if they do not participate in the May Commencement, they do not have a realistic opportunity to participate in a public event celebrating their academic achievements. This is often a great disappointment to them and to their families and friends.

Based upon conversations with faculty leadership, the Registrar, and senior academic leaders, this memo intends to clarify what is acceptable and where colleges/schools have latitude in deciding the level of participation that is permitted. The basic premises surrounding this issue include:

- Official documentation that a student has completed degree requirements is conveyed on the official WVU transcript for that student and by issuing an official diploma to that student. Official diplomas are no longer distributed at May Commencement ceremonies, further differentiating the ceremony from the specific achievement of a diploma.

- Participation in commencement ceremonies is a public recognition of students' academic efforts and accomplishments, but does not imply that all degree requirements have been met. Official Commencement programs convey the list of students who applied for graduation, not those who have been awarded degrees. The disclaimer in programs reads as follows:

"Disclaimer: The list of degree candidates in this program is tentative and based on the list of students who applied for graduation. It is based upon the anticipated successful completion of work undertaken during the Second
Semester of (academic year). The document should not be taken as an official record that degrees have, in fact, been awarded. Any honors indicated in this document are also based on work completed through a student's next to last term at WVU. Latin honors accompanying the final degree (e.g. summa cum laude) are calculated into a student's grade point average after the last semester is completed."

- Students who finish degree requirements during the summer or fall semester are offered the opportunity to be officially recognized at the December Convocation ceremony.

In order to give public recognition to the work of our graduates who will officially complete all degree requirements following the May Commencement, but before the end of summer (August 15), students could be permitted to participate in May Commencement under the following conditions:

- The college dean, as certifying officer, has sufficient evidence that the student is highly likely to complete all degree requirements by the official August graduation date.

- The commencement program clearly states that students participating in the ceremony may not have completed all degree requirements, but that they are expected to do so by the official August graduation date.

- Graduate students may be hooded if they have successfully defended thesis or dissertation work, even if all follow-up work has not yet been completed, as long as the dean (and advisor) believes this work will be completed before the official August graduation date.

- Regardless of which Commencement ceremony students participate in—if any—all students must apply for graduation from the university. (e.g. Students who participate in May Commencement but do not graduate until August must apply for August graduation.)

We believe that these guidelines protect the integrity of WVU degrees while offering our graduates an opportunity for public recognition of their accomplishments. Individual colleges may choose to adopt stricter rules about participation but are encouraged to take students' needs into account. Any questions about interpretation of these guidelines should be forwarded to the Provost's Office or to the Chancellor's office for the HSC professional schools and programs.

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