

MEMORANDUM

Approved, 4/15/2024

TO: Fort Wayne Senate  
FROM: Steven A. Hanke, Chair of the Education Policy Committee  
DATE: 2/12/2024  
SUBJ: Commencement Ceremony Schedule

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WHEREAS SD 22-25 charged the Education Policy Committee (EPC) to complete its information-gathering process related to scheduling an alternative weekend date for the commencement ceremony,

WHEREAS the EPC discussed the issue with Jerry Lewis (VC Communications & Marketing) and Marcus Weemes (Executive Director of Housing),

WHEREAS the EPC believes that the information provided indicates the net benefits (e.g., utilized venue, operational demands on PFW employees, minimizing scheduling conflicts, housing costs) by Jerry Lewis and Marcus Weemes on the following pages supports maintaining the current commencement ceremony schedule of the Wednesday following the conclusion of finals week,

BE IT RESOLVED that PFW maintain its current commencement ceremony schedule of the Wednesday following the conclusion of final exams.

## Information provided by Jerry Lewis

### PFW COMMENCEMENT ATTENDANCE

The 2022 Commencement marked the first ceremony following the Indiana University teach out. In other words, 2022 marked the first ceremony featuring only PFW graduates. Participation among graduating students increased significantly in 2023, which corresponded with a more than 50 percent increase in overall attendance (graduating students and guests).

#### 2023 Commencement Attendance

Undergraduate Students	806
Graduate Students	<u>218</u>
Total Graduating Students	1,024

*Total Attendance (including guests)*                      7,949

#### 2022 Commencement Attendance

Undergraduate Students	595
Graduate Students	<u>112</u>
Total Graduating Students	707

*Total Attendance (including guests)*                      5,136

### VENUE / LOCATION ISSUES

- The Coliseum and Expo Center is the only venue that is large enough to accommodate both the Commencement Ceremony (main arena) and the Commencement Celebration (Expo Center). There is no other suitable venue in Fort Wayne, as is evidenced by the fact that so many universities and high schools use the Coliseum for their commencement ceremonies.
- The Coliseum is also the only venue that has the dozen or so large breakout rooms and spaces that can accommodate the undergraduate lineup area, graduate hooding area, faculty robing area, platform party/VIP robing area, luncheons, alumni dinner, and staff/tech areas.
- The Coliseum has robust catering facilities capable of meeting all of the catering required for the various events and activities related to commencement.
- Having adequate parking and traffic flow is essential, and the Coliseum is equipped to meet the university's needs.
- The university stores a significant volume of Commencement-related staging and infrastructure in PFW's on-campus warehouse. Additional time and cost would be incurred in transporting these materials back and forth to a different location.

### SCHEDULING ISSUES

- The Commencement Ceremony and related functions currently require a minimum of two full days of space rental at the Coliseum. Load-in and set-up begin early morning the day before Commencement and often the night before (pending whether Komets are in the playoffs, and the space is available).

- In order to have a Ceremony there on a Sunday, this setup would ideally have to begin on a Friday evening; a Saturday ceremony would require setup to begin on a Thursday evening. These are prime rentable days and nights for the Coliseum and Expo Center for concerts, trade shows, and other events. Even if we could find weekends in future years that the space is available, it would be at a premium price.
- The Sunday following the current Wednesday Commencement Ceremony dates is usually Mother's Day. That would be a very unpopular weekend to schedule a Commencement Ceremony.

### **STAFFING ISSUES**

- A weekend Commencement Ceremony would require having a significant number of university staff work off hours and beyond their normal work schedules. It's already a challenge to adequately staff for the setup, ceremony, and celebration/after-party.
- Additionally, a large number of staff and volunteers are hourly employees who would need to be paid overtime, thus resulting in additional expense.

### **IMPACT ON GRADUATING STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

- Moving the Commencement Ceremony to a weekend would impact students and families of various religious faiths who have observances, services, and gatherings on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Moving the Commencement Ceremony to a weekend would impact families with children who have sporting events and club activities that meet on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Having the Commencement Ceremony at a later date than currently scheduled could have an impact on international students who might incur additional costs to extend their stay in the country.

### **Information provided by Marcus Weemes**

- Housing Operational Costs would increase (utilities and extra staffing due to having additional students in all buildings) creating also a shorter period of time for summer camps, conferences and summer interns that help offset the costs for students during the academic year by delaying the arrival by over a week and a half from the current ceremony. This could also add additional costs for having vendors come in to flip and prepare rooms for summer and fall.
- We are already providing all graduating students 5 nights of free housing beyond their housing contract which is at least ~\$135 per student.
- In an ideal world for operations if Graduation could be the weekend of finals that would create the least friction on our operations and actually improve our ability to serve students (preparing for transition to summer housing/interns/summer camps). This has been my first institution that has had graduation beyond Sunday of Finals Week.