CAL POLY
COMMENCEMENT

Mustangs Forever
Cal Poly Commencement:
Focused on the Student Experience
Commencement Policy Committee
University Standing Committee

Scope:
• Makes recommendations and advises President and Vice President on commencement policy relating to:
  • Invited keynote speakers
  • Student commencement fees
  • Operational policy on posthumous degrees
  • Student’s eligibility to graduate
  • Petition request process
  • Parking and traffic impacts
  • Guest accommodations (including ADA)
  • Official academic regalia
  • College pairings at Fall and Spring ceremonies
  • Cultural commencement ceremonies
  • Honorary degrees
  • Ticketing requirements

• Meets twice yearly
• Consists of 16 members
Commencement Policy Committee, Cont...
University Standing Committee

**Policy Committee members:**

- Chair – Vice President for Student Affairs
- Two Faculty Grand Marshals
- President’s Chief of Staff
- Two ASI student representatives
- Provost nominee for Academic Affairs
- Assistant Vice President, Alumni Relations
- Faculty representative, CAFES
- Faculty representative, CAED
- Faculty representative, OCOB
- Faculty representative, CENG
- Faculty representative, CLA
- Faculty representative, CSM
- Director of Commencement

**Current members:**

- Keith Humphrey
- Andrew Schaffner & Chip Appel
- Rachel Fernflores (Jessica Darin – May ’16)
- Cyrus Ebadat & Emilie Morse
- Dean for CAED, Christine Theodoropoulos
- Ellen Cohune
- Ann De Lay
- Cornelius Nuworsoo
- Eric Olsen
- Dean Arakaki
- Michael Latner
- Tom Gutierrez
- Tessa Espinoza
Commencement Operations Committee
University Standing Committee

Scope:
- Executes all commencement events throughout the year.
- A collaborative working committee focused on all operations and logistics related to commencement.
- Meets monthly during academic year
- Consists of 26 members

Responsibilities include:
- Comprehensive marketing and communication strategy
- Electronic and hard copy ticketing for over 40,000 people
- Campus-wide facility operations
- Security, safety and campus-wide parking
- Presidential events and stewardship of VIP guests
- Campus-wide signage, traffic, and crowd control
- ADA compliancy
- Collaboration with all internal and external vendors
- Collaboration with city of San Luis Obispo, including promotional banners downtown, communication with hotels
Commencement Operations Committee

Commencement Operations Committee, Cont...
University Standing Committee

Operations Committee members:

- Two Faculty Grand Marshals
- ASI student representative
- Two Office of the President representatives
- Provost nominee for Academic Affairs
- University Marketing & Communications
- Asst. Vice President of Alumni Relations & Alumni staff
- Facilities Manager
- Athletics
- University Bookstore
- Faculty from Music Department
- UPD Commander and Parking Manager
- Commencement Staff
- Director of Disability Resources

Current members:

- Andrew Schaffner & Chip Appel
- Seth Borges
- Diane Haupt & Dana Matteson
- Staci Shoals
- Royaa Silver & Sasha Palazzo
- Ellen Cohune & Maureen O’Connor
- Donald Popham
- Stacia Momburg
- Preston Sirois & Annette Bly
- Andrew McMahan & Thomas Davies
- Brenda Trobaugh & Gwen Nielsen
- Katie Stubberfield & Tessa Espinoza
- Debi Hill & Vanessa Domínguez
Partners in Success

External Vendors

- Freestyle Event Services
  Audio and Staging
- Central Coast Industries
  Portable Toilets
- Got You Cover’d
  Chairs, Tents & Stanchions
- RideOn
  Shuttles
- Central Coast Printing
  Postcards & Name badges
- CRS
  Posters, Pamphlets & Signage
- Michael Jones
  Doves
- Epic Entertainment
  Photo Booth
- PolyTix
  Tickets and Scanning
- Left Coast Tshirts
  Usher Vests
- San Luis Ambulance
  Ambulance Service
- Robert Cooper
  Big Screen Conductor
- Vino Vice
  Security Service
- BestCare Pharmacy
  Wheelchairs
- Mr. Pickles
  Volunteer and Staff lunch
**Additional groups that are regularly consulted:**
(Part of our collaborative and inclusive decision-making process)

- Various Student Groups and Committees
- ASI Student Government Leaders
- ASI Workshop
- Parent Advisory Council
- Dean’s Council
- President’s Cabinet
- City of San Luis Obispo Elected Officials
- University Housing (relating to concurrent move-out traffic)
- Student Affairs Senior Leadership Team
- Survey feedback from students, parents/supporters and faculty/staff
Spring Commencement Snapshot

Monthly
• Hold monthly Commencement Operations Committee meetings

9-12 months prior
• Review survey feedback
• Finalize keynote speaker(s)
• Finalize date/time/structure

8 months prior
• Develop Mar/Comm Plan to grads and families
• Facilitate Open Forums for college coordinators
• Create checklists for colleges
• Hold Commencement Policy Committee Meeting

7 months prior
• Finalize Honorary Degree Recipients

6 months prior
• Contact and reserve all vendors/services
• Develop interactive mobile app
• Initiate communication to grads
• Facilitate outstanding Senior Award nominees

5 months prior
• Finalize college/department event details
• Confirm all spaces are secure/scheduled
• Confirm Chancellor’s Office attendees
• Process all petition requests

4 months prior
• Manage/author Commencement Program
• Mail materials to all parents of eligible graduates
• Finalize keynote speaker details/requests
• Finalize Cultural Commencement ceremonies

3 months prior
• Organize/coordinate Commencement Fair
• Design/coordinate commencement ticketing
• Author/finalize commencement scripts
• Hold Commencement Policy Committee Meeting
• Coordinate all accessibility services, shuttle routes, wheelchair rentals and closed captioning services
• Finalize processional and seating charts for platform
• Request final remarks from all ceremony speakers
Logistics and Planning Time Line: 10,000 ft. view

2 months prior
• Disseminate comprehensive grad instruction pamphlet
• Collaborate with Grand Marshals to organize Marshals
• Hire over 100 student employees and volunteers

1 month prior
• Walk-through facilities/conduct vendor dry-runs
• Conduct several detailed training sessions for volunteers
• Support College Marshal trainings
• Disseminate certificates to colleges
• Deploy instructions/materials to Platform Party
• Deploy instructions to college marshals
• Finalize all VIP and Presidential events
• Conduct Presidential briefing

1 week prior
• Grad Week events
• Assemble over 5,000 Cal Poly Proud bags for grads and faculty
• Finalize stadium set-up
• Deliver scripts to all platform party members
• Host walk-through rehearsal in stadium
Our Current Process for Addressing Change
Addressing Change

**How Decisions Are Made**

**Consultation and Input**
- Campus Standing Committees
- Survey Data
- National Research
- Issues & Complaints

**Commencement Office**

**Proposals**

**Approvals**

**Decisions**

**Constituent Groups Providing Input:**
- Commencement Operations Committee
- Commencement Policy Committee
- President’s Cabinet
- College Deans
- College Departments Heads/Chairs
- Graduate/Parents/Faculty Survey Data
- ASI Student Government

Commencement Office receives and funnels information, seeks recommendations/approval, and implements change.

**Constituent Groups Approving Change:**
- President’s Cabinet
- College Deans
Commencement Office along with Commencement Operations and Policy Committees have addressed and successfully resolved several concerns over the years including:

- **Overall duration of the ceremony**
  - Total ceremony length trimmed to 90 min
- **Ceremony timing due to sun/heat of the day**
  - Moved morning ceremonies to 9am
- **Ceremony structure**
  - Changed to a 3-ceremony model
- **ADA Compliancy at all commencement events**
  - Achieved full compliancy at all 45 events
- **Signage and traffic flow throughout campus**
- **Created a task force, routed traffic exclusively on Highland**
- **Duration of graduate and faculty processional**
  - Trimmed graduate and faculty processional to 13 minutes
- **Accessibility for guests with a mobility impairment**
  - Increased and re-routed shuttles, rented 75 wheelchairs
- **Shortage of tickets distributed per graduates**
  - Increased number of tickets per grad from 7 to 10
A Deeper Look at a Recent Issue that was successfully resolved:

In Spring 2014, 46% of post-commencement college/department ceremonies were not ADA compliant (21 out of 45)

Our Process toward Resolution:

• Worked with Facilities Planning to determine all ADA compliant locations on campus (July 2014)
• Presented 3 well-developed scenarios to the Deans (Aug 2014)
• Upon request by the Deans, presented 3 well-developed scenarios to the Dept Heads and Chairs (Sept 2014)
• Consulted with Commencement Policy Committee (Oct 2014)
• Support from Commencement Operations Committee (Sept 2014 – June 2015)

Once a decision was reached:

• Held 2 Open Forums for the college coordinators (December 2014)
• Provided a detailed checklist to all college coordinators (January 2015)
• All 45 College/Department events were fully ADA-compliant (June 2015)
Additional Positive Changes:

• Established timeless brand – Mustangs Forever
• Customized commencement mobile app
• Live streaming (YouTube) and closed captioning
• Advanced ticket scanning technology
• Interactive customized map online
• New and improved commencement website
• Enhanced social media campaign
• Hand fans and water for all grads, guests, and faculty
• Implemented and increased streamers each year for ‘Big Finish’!
• Implemented Cal Poly Proud pinning ceremony
• Incorporated recognition of alumni guests during ceremonies
• Commencement fair expansion
Proposed Change for Spring 2016
Key Issue Addressed with College Deans:

Opportunity for Improvement with the College and Department Events

- Survey responses identified frustration with college/department events and the lack of organization.
- The overall positive rating for the college/department events dropped from 70% to 65% this year.
- 54% of grads felt college/department communication was poor
- Parents rated college/department events poorly
- Anecdotal feedback from President and others
Research and Data Collected to Address this Issue:

• 18 of the 23 CSU campuses conduct name reading at their main university-wide ceremonies.

• The CSU average ceremony duration is 2 hours, 10 minutes
  (including name reading and processional).

• 4 CSU campuses conduct separate departmental ceremonies
  (3 of these 4 conduct name reading at their department events).

• Cal Poly processional duration has decreased from 40 down to 15 minutes.

• Each graduate name would require 3-5 seconds
  (utilizing professional name readers)

• “Name reading & walking across the stage” listed as most important
  to include in the university-wide ceremony (Graduate survey)
**Recommendation from President’s Cabinet:**

(After consultation with various constituent groups, including College Deans and Department Heads/Chairs)

- The main university ceremonies in Spanos stadium to include individual name reading for each graduate
- *Following* each university ceremony, colleges and departments may host receptions or events
- Colleges and departments determine level of formality and structure for their event or reception
  - Formal staging, A/V, seating, name reading and event ticketing are optional and could be eliminated (decreased cost to colleges and departments)
- The university will continue to host 3 main commencement ceremonies in Spanos Stadium
  - 2 colleges represented at each
- The main university ceremonies will last approximately 2 hours
  - Some historical ceremony elements will be abbreviated or eliminated
- Professional name readers will be utilized
  - Total time added for name reading = approximately 1 hour
- Staging changes will accommodate two lines for graduate path of travel
- Commencement photography and faculty/student congratulatory exchanges will be conducted on the field