Executive Summary

In order to provide a consistent experience for all graduates and guests, it is recommended that an all-college Commencement Ceremony be held in which all graduates will receive individual recognition. The recommended venue is Moffett Lawn. In these recommendations, there are a number of considerations for both the venue and ways in which the individual identities of the colleges can be highlighted in the ceremony logistics and programming. Furthermore, it is recommended that colleges host recognition events and/or receptions leading up to Saturday’s all-college Commencement Ceremony. It is also recommended that the new structure be implemented with the May 2018 Commencement, thereby providing a University capstone experience, while also showcasing the unique identity and distinctive composition of each of our colleges and streamlining and maximizing the experience for graduates and guests.

Background

On May 15, 2017, President Hemphill constituted a Commencement Working Group to review the feasibility and structure of hosting an all-college Commencement Ceremony in which all graduates will receive individual recognition. The group was charged with reviewing best practices and similar ceremony structures of other colleges and universities, while maintaining the identity of the individual colleges as part of the main ceremony and related programming elements.

The Commencement Working Group met on May 22, 2017; June 8, 2017; June 22, 2017; July 6, 2017; and August 8, 2017. In addition to group members, meetings included representatives from various departments and offices such as Emergency Management, Facilities, Information Technology and Campus Police. Furthermore, various individuals, including all college deans and other University officials, were consulted, and their feedback and recommendations were shared with and discussed by the full group.

Review of Best Practices and Similar Ceremony Structures

The group reviewed ceremony structures for a total of four institutions, including Clemson University, East Tennessee State University, University of Pittsburgh and Vanderbilt University. Of greatest interest to the group was the University of Pittsburgh, which utilized a single ceremony structure in spring 2017 with 1,800 undergraduates crossing the stage. The entire ceremony, including the processional, lasted 2 ½ hours. In spring 2017, Radford University had approximately 1,700 undergraduates. Based on the review of other ceremonies, the feasibility of Radford University
having an all-college Commencement Ceremony was validated. Furthermore, it was confirmed that once graduates’ names are called, they would have an opportunity to receive their “degree” from a college-level representative, specifically the dean, shake hands with the president and have professional photographs taken.

**Overarching Recommendations**

From the research of best practices and discussion among the group, the following is recommended for consideration and implementation in May 2018, with the overarching goal of maximizing the experience of our graduates and guests:

- Calling of each individual graduate’s name must be timed precisely in order to ensure the best balance between the graduate’s special moment and maintaining sensitivity regarding the length of the ceremony.
- Video displays are recommended for maximum visibility.
- Three photo opportunities are recommended with a professional photographer, specifically one prior to ascending stage, one while on the stage and one after exiting the stage. Although the handshake will occur, a photo is not recommended in order to maximize time and ensure the continuous flow of the ceremony.
- It is recommended that graduates enter on both sides of stage and exit in center.
- Three podiums are recommended in order to have two name callers, one on each side of the stage. The center podium is recommended for ceremony remarks, such as the Commencement speakers and the President’s remarks.
- In order to maintain individual college identities and a strong faculty presence, the recommended composition of the platform party includes members of the Board of Visitors and Leadership Council, as well as associate deans and department chairs.
- Based on the group’s deliberations and research, it is anticipated that there will be some level of cost and resource savings with the revised structure. The majority of savings is the result of not setting up multiple locations. Facilities staff and public safety officers will be able to concentrate on one area rather than multiple locations. Additionally, audiovisual equipment and staff will not be required in multiple locations.
  - Increased communication and enhanced visibility are recommended with graduates and guests, as well as the general public. This recommended revised structure provides a unique opportunity to showcase the complete Commencement experience at Radford University, one that is student-centered and spans many weeks with various activities, celebrations and recognitions.
  - If needed, utilization of the existing inclement weather plan is recommended. This plan, which has been in place for a number of years, utilizes the Bondurant Auditorium and Dedmon Center on a single day, specifically Commencement Saturday.

**Additional Recommendations**

**Maintaining College Identities**

While the primary goal of Commencement is to provide an enjoyable and rewarding experience for our graduates and guests, an emphasis will be placed on showcasing the individual identity of each college. In order to do so, the following is recommended:

- Banners will be designed and produced. The college banners would be carried during the processional and displayed during the ceremony.
- A short video highlighting each college will be produced and played prior to the names being called in that particular college. The group recommends the videos as a way to showcase the colleges and enhance the variety of the ceremony.
- The Commencement printed program will contain additional information about each college. This change will provide a feature for each college and provide a clear and distinct transition between colleges within the pages of the program.
Each college will have the opportunity to host a program or reception during the week leading up to Commencement. All events will be promoted as part of the University’s formal Commencement schedule. Preliminary discussions about possible events, including times and locations, were held with each college dean. Details regarding these discussions follow this report. At this time, it is anticipated that both the College of Business and Economics and the College of Visual and Performing Arts will hold their events the morning of the all-college Commencement Ceremony. The tentative location for the College of Business and Economics event is Kyle Hall, and the identified locations for the College of Visual and Performing Arts are the Sculpture Garden (if no rain) and the Covington Center (in the event of rain). It is anticipated that the Artis College of Science and Technology will combine its event with a previously held Dean’s Scholars event, which is traditionally held the week prior to Commencement. The College of Education and Human Development and the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences will likely hold their events the day before the all-college Commencement Ceremony. Furthermore, the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences will merge the previously held Dean’s Scholars event with this larger college-wide event. Depending on the start time of college events to be held the day prior, a change in the start time for both the College of Graduate Studies and Research Hooding and Commencement Ceremony and the Multicultural Congratulatory Ceremony may need to be considered.

Inclusion of master’s- and doctoral-level graduates in the all-college Commencement Ceremony is strongly recommended. Their participation in this ceremony will be in addition to attending the College of Graduate Studies and Research Hooding and Commencement Ceremony, where they will be hooded by one of their faculty members. These graduates will be encouraged to attend the all-college Commencement Ceremony in order to receive individual recognition with fellow graduates from their respective colleges and/or departments in order to provide additional recognition to these outstanding scholars, while also serving as encouragement and inspiration for bachelor’s level graduates to continue their academic pursuits. It is strongly recommended that inclusion of master’s and doctoral-level graduates be implemented even in the event of continuation of the existing structure of the Main Commencement Ceremony.

The consideration of starting the all-college Commencement Ceremony at 11 a.m. is recommended in order to allow time for the college-hosted receptions and events that may be held that morning.

Selecting the Venue

The Commencement Working Group discussed in great detail the challenges and opportunities for all locations across campus. Ultimately, the group conducted a detailed analysis for an all-college Commencement Ceremony on Moffett Lawn, the site of the University’s Main Commencement Ceremony, as well as Patrick D. Cupp Memorial Stadium.
After careful consideration, the recommended venue for the all-college Commencement Ceremony is Moffett Lawn due to the following:

- **Safety:** Based on discussions with the University’s Emergency Management personnel, there are concerns regarding the response to a potential issue due to Cupp Stadium’s location and limited egress routes. Additionally, the Dedmon Center is the closest indoor facility; however, it would not be possible to accommodate the anticipated crowd in the event of a shelter-in-place incident.

- **Experience:** The purpose of the group was to examine, and ultimately determine, the best experience possible for our graduates and guests. The group is aware that changing the structure of the ceremony will present some new challenges, and adding a new location may create additional challenges that would be unanticipated due to a lack of prior experience with events of this magnitude at Cupp Stadium.

- **Familiarity:** The Moffett Lawn site is one that is very familiar to academic and administrative staff. With past experiences related to the Main Commencement Ceremony at Moffett Lawn and a firm understanding of the revised structure for an all-college Commencement Ceremony, there will be an opportunity to maximize planning efforts and minimize unforeseen circumstances related to a new venue.

- **Cost:** Initial budget estimates from Facilities staff provides a baseline comparison of Moffett Lawn and Cupp Stadium. The cost comparison includes chairs, staging, restroom facilities, set-up costs, housekeeping services, security barriers, security officers (internal through Radford University Police Department and external through RMC Events, Inc.), transit and golf carts, video displays and audiovisual services. Moffett Lawn is projected to represent a nominal cost savings of approximately 5 percent when compared to Cupp Stadium. However, when compared to May 2017 Commencement expenses, it represents a cost savings of nearly 10 percent, while, at the same time, maximizing the experience for our graduates and guests.

- **Continuation of Recent Changes:** For the May 2017 Commencement, additional seating and crowd control barriers were added. Continuation of both of these items is recommended. Furthermore, possible inclusion of further additions to seating capacity is recommended due to anticipated larger crowds. For additional information regarding seating, crowd control barriers and other set-up items, please consult the Moffett Lawn layout, prepared by Facilities, highlighting the recommended items contained within this report.

**Maximizing the Experience**

Additional recommendations were put forth in order to maximize the experience for our graduates and guests:

- **Video Displays:** After careful research through cost and service comparisons, the utilization of video displays is recommended to enhance the guest experience and overall viewing. Information Technology staff has engaged with several companies that are able to provide such services with the appropriate equipment. It is anticipated that
two large video displays (one on each side of the stage) will provide ample coverage for all guests. It is strongly recommended that video displays are implemented even in the event of continuation of the existing structure of the Main Commencement Ceremony. This addition is critically important to ensuring the viewing ability of individuals seated toward the rear of Moffett Lawn.

**Permanent Center Stairway:** For safety and aesthetic reasons, it is recommended that a permanent center stairway be constructed in front of Moffett Hall leading from the lawn to the raised platform area. Facilities has generated an initial cost estimated for this work. It is important to note that, in the past, temporary stairs have been utilized to ascend from the stage area to the lawn area. However, due to their temporary nature, they are both unsafe and unattractive. With the revised Commencement structure, center stairs are recommended as they are a safer option and can be constructed to complement the iconic architecture of our campus, allowing for beautiful photo opportunities during an all-college Commencement Ceremony and future events. The permanent center stairway will also add to the functionality of campus, thereby providing another path for foot traffic in and around Moffett Lawn.

**Closing and Next Steps**

The recommendations related to the all-college Commencement Ceremony, as contained in this report, have been thoroughly reviewed and carefully vetted by the Commencement Working Group. Therefore, members of this group request careful review and full consideration by President Hemphill, in consultation with the President’s Cabinet and Leadership Council, for possible implementation.

Following any changes or other recommendations by the administration, the Commencement Committee should begin its work immediately. Please note that, with the recommended changes in the Commencement structure, it is further recommended that an individual who is well-versed in event planning and has been an integral part of past Commencement ceremonies and related activities be charged with leading Commencement logistics. This individual can do so in the role of chair of the Commencement Committee or an ex-officio and/or unofficial co-chair role. The ability of the designated individual to carefully plan and flawlessly execute the intricate details and extensive logistics of this plan and ceremony are critically important to providing the very best experience for our graduates and guests.

In addition to the work of the Commencement Committee, a new communications strategy must be developed with the expertise of University Relations staff under the leadership of Vice President Joe Carpenter. Furthermore, colleges will need to confirm details for their respective events. Finally, the revised structure will require discussions with and possible site visits by vendors in the very near future in order to ensure a successful all-college Commencement Ceremony and related activities to be held in May 2018.