



Senate of the Associated Students of the University of Nevada

88th Session, 2020-2021

A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF AN IN-PERSON COMMENCEMENT FOR SPRING 2021

Resolution Number: 151

Authored By: Senator Huber, Senator Lambert, Senator Ramirez, and Senator Stoddard

Sponsored By: The Committee on Academics and Student Affairs

Whereas, the achievements of the graduating students of Spring 2021 at the University of Nevada, Reno must be recognized and congratulated;

Whereas, Marie Hartwell-Walker, EdD stated, “the graduation ceremony is the closet thing most Americans have to a rite of passage into adulthood;”¹

Whereas, the University of Nevada, Reno plans to conduct a virtual commencement in May 2021;²

Whereas, thousands of seniors in the past year have missed out on their commencement due to the COVID-19 pandemic;

Whereas, United States President, Joe Biden, released a statement stating, “we’re now on track to have enough vaccine supply for every adult in America by the end of May;”³

Whereas, students and faculty have begun receiving COVID-19 vaccinations from the university;

Whereas, Nevada state Governor, Steve Sisolak, has approved of live entertainment and performances with the condition of maintaining at least 6 feet for artists and performers with masks and 12 feet for artists and performers without masks for the Emergency Directive;⁴

¹ <https://psychcentral.com/lib/yes-you-should-go-to-your-graduation#1>

² <https://www.unr.edu/commencement>

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/03/02/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-administrations-covid-19-vaccination-efforts/>

⁴ <https://nvhealthresponse.nv.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/3.5-NVHR-performers.pdf>

Whereas, this updated Emergency Directive allows for larger gatherings which includes events such as Commencement;

Whereas, the state of Nevada allows full indoor casinos to operate given compliance of various mitigation measures such as handwashing, social-distancing, and station cleaning procedures;

Whereas, graduating students pay a grad fee of \$95 to cover costs for their graduation;

Whereas, conducting an in-person commencement will not procure any additional costs to the university if done at an on-campus venue;

Whereas, not all senior planning to graduate in May 2021 will attend an in-person commencement due to fear of risk, distance, or feeling indifferent about commencement, thus reducing the amount of attendees;

Whereas, the University of Arizona plans to celebrate the class of 2021 with a series of in-person, graduate-only ceremonies for their commencement;⁵

Whereas, the University of Utah also plans to have an in-person commencement as well as a livestream version for students who choose to not attend in-person;⁶

Whereas, the petition for 2021 graduates to host an in-person graduation has over 3,000 signatures as of March 10, 2021;⁷

Whereas, a coalition of students have devised a list of strategic solutions to serve as alternate forms for outside graduation and how they may be facilitated as seen in Addendum A;

Whereas, a student attending the University of Nevada, Reno, Oscar Loyd has created a university-wide proposal for commencement in Addendum B;

Be it resolved that, the Associated Student of the University of Nevada support an in-person commencement for Spring 2021;

Be it further resolved that, a copy of this resolution be sent to:

- University President, Brian Sandoval

⁵ <https://commencement.arizona.edu/>

⁶ <https://commencement.utah.edu/index.php>

⁷ https://www.change.org/p/university-of-nevada-reno-allow-2021-unr-graduates-to-have-in-person-commencement?recruiter=551725214&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=petition_dashboard&recruited_by_id=98b7a820-29f8-11e6-bff2-bf6e1d645245

- Vice President of Student Services, Shannon Ellis
- ASUN President, Dominique Hall
- Dean of the College of Business, Gregory Mosier
- Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Debra Moddelmog
- Dean of the College of Science, Jeffrey Thompson
- Dean of the College of Community Health Science, Trudy Larson
- Dean of the Orvis School of Nursing, Debra Thomas
- Dean of the College of Education and Human Development, Donald Easton-Brooks
- Dean of the College Engineering, Manos Maragakis
- Dean of the College of Agriculture, Biotechnology, and Natural Resources, Bill Payne
- Dean of the Reynolds School of Journalism, Alan Stavitsky

Adopted in Senate on March 31st, 2021

Attest:

Hope Cronan, Senate Secretary

Keegan Murphy, Speaker of the Senate

Addendum A

1. Reducing the number of people in a single space – splitting the graduate schools and college so that each ceremony is smaller, creating a limit on the number of guests allowed for each student, etc.
2. Classes and degrees can be done in shifts at different times of the day in safe conditions.
3. Larger venues – Mackay Stadium or other parks/public spaces that will be allowing 50% capacity after March 1st, 2021.
4. Proper rules and regulations implemented – masks required, people seated 6 feet apart, hand hygiene, waiver forms required, negative COVID test results, etc.
5. Allow for only students to attend commencement ceremonies and have it live-streamed for the audience virtually.
6. Online options- available for those who do not feel comfortable or are unable to attend.
7. Require students to sign a liability waiver ensuring that the university is not liable for any COVID-19 cases linked to the ceremony.
8. Combination of all the above.

Addendum B

Overview

The subject of this proposal is the May 2021 graduation for the University of Nevada, Reno. Though the University has currently settled for a virtual graduation, I believe there is a unique opportunity for the University with its students to pioneer towards the future and hold a live, in-person graduation.

The Objective

- Organize an in-person University graduation.
- Ensure that graduation follows all COVID-19 protocols.

The Opportunity

- Provide students and faculty a long-desired live graduation.
- Show how student engagement and organization can accomplish great feats.

The Solution

- Have a graduation hosted in one of three proposed areas.
- Students may only have a maximum of 3 guests attend the in-person event.
- Have all students and guest groups sit 10 feet apart to follow COVID-19 guidelines.

OUR PROPOSAL

With the recent progress of the COVID-19 vaccines, as well as the dropping case numbers within Reno, I believe we have made tremendous improvements in health within this city. As of February 17, 2021, Governor Sisolak gave the directive to “increase the occupancy of school building or facilities to the lesser of 250 or 75% of maximum occupancy”. On top of this, the Governor also issues to “adopt social distancing protocols with a minimum allowable distance of 3 feet between students and 6 feet between adults and students or other adults”. Given this, and the fact that many services such as the campus gym are open today, I believe that, with proper organizing and planning, the University of Nevada, Reno can have its own small graduation.

This would not only give students their long-desired dream to have their graduation, but it would also give faculty the sought-after event to see their students graduate and move forward in their lives. Graduation is a precious moment in all our lives, and I would like to make that moment become a reality once again. With the help of the student clubs, ASUN, Student Services, and other organizations, I am more than confident we could host a graduation while ensuring the safety and health of all in attendance.

Execution Strategy on Graduation Day

The format of how graduation will be organized is dependent on how many graduating seniors there are, as well as how many would be willing to attend. Though I do not have these exact numbers, I am willing to estimate there to be around 1,500-4,500. This range is so large because some students will not feel comfortable, some students cannot attend due

to distance, and others simply do not care for the official ceremony. With this sheer amount, I propose the use of one of three locations to host this graduation:

- 1) Mackay Stadium
- 2) Lawlor Events Center
- 3) Reno-Sparks Convention Center

All numbers presented are projections and are an underestimation of the total seats available.

Mackay Stadium

The Mackay Stadium is a beautiful venue which is ideal for an in-person graduation. With a total seating capacity of 30,000, it can hold thousands of people while maintaining social distancing. If each student were to invite a maximum of three individuals, who would sit together, and remain 10 feet apart from each group, the stadium could hold a minimum of 4,868 people. This is a conservative number since I do not have the official mapping and seating arrangement for the stadium. If people had to sit in rows 10 feet apart with people only in every other row, there are an estimated 2,163 seats available, and if we cross scattered, there are an estimated 4,327 seats.

On top of this, when we calculated the total space available on the field with the track, a minimum of 1,035 students could be placed with the remainder on the front row of the stands. With the best use of space, the stadium would be able to hold over 6,000 people between students and guests. If we were able to have a more accurate number of students interested, we would be able to adjust the number of guests available per student, if there will be any guests at all.

With proper documentation, numbers, and estimates, we could narrow all these numbers to a more exact estimate, and plan accordingly from there.

Lawlor Events Center

The Lawlor Events Center is another wonderful option. With 11,536 seats available, a low estimate of 1,664 individuals would be placed within the center. Unfortunately, with such a low number, the option for individual guests becomes less likely if we were to hold onto current regulations of 10 feet apart. When we factor the basketball court into this calculation, I have a low estimate of another 100 students, including the stage.

Though not as ideal as Mackay Stadium, the Lawlor Events Center provides shelter from the sun's heat and can easily stream the students on the monitors. If we were to use this area, it would most likely be for students only and there would have to be a modified version of the traditional walk.

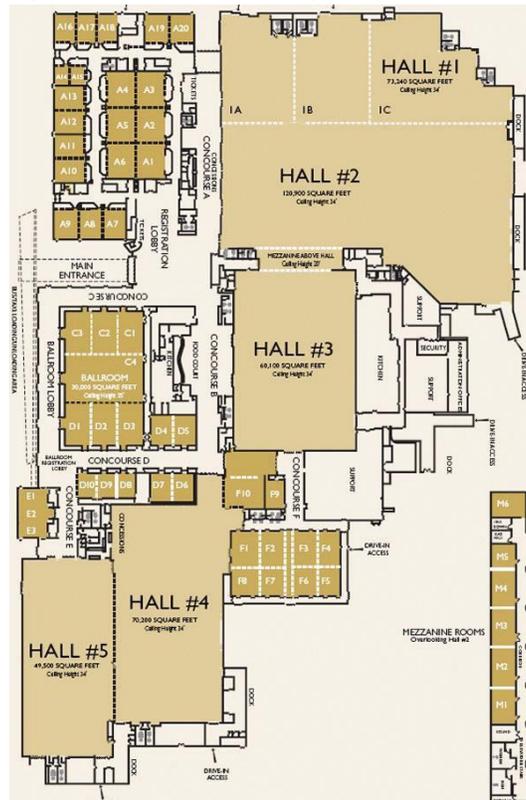
Reno-Sparks Convention Center

Not too far from campus, the Reno-Sparks Convention Center is the perfect collaboration of both the Lawlor Events Center and Mackay Stadium. The Convention Center has two

main parts that the University would be interested in which are the largest room and largest exhibit. The largest exhibit has 382,000 square feet of room, and with the most conservative calculations, 4,777 people could be placed. The largest room has 120,900 square feet of room, leading to a conservative calculation of 1,511 people. However, this space can be expanded several thousands of square feet, allowing for more individuals. However, if chair placement were to be maximized, there could be thousands of more chairs available in the Convention Center.

When it comes to exactly how the University would want to use this space, there are several options. If the university were to only have the event for students, no guests, we could simply use the exhibit to host the event. Another approach is to have the exhibit for students and use the largest room with additional halls to host the guests, where they can observe the graduation from screens.

Without a doubt, this space has the most versatility, opportunity, and the University's best chance to host a graduation that resembles past graduations. The image below is a layout of the Convention Center. We have used the space countless times for TEDx and other events, so the university is well acquainted with the facility.



General Ceremony

In terms of the ceremony, it will follow a similar format to past graduations. The “Pomp and Circumstance” will be played as well as the National Anthem, both most likely will be recorded and played from speakers. The walk to the seats will most likely need a different choreography than past graduations to prevent students from walking through clustered areas. However, this can be easily planned and arranged if the proposal is approved. In terms of speeches, I believe that past formats of a professor and 1-3 students giving their speeches is still doable, given that masks are worn, or there is plexiglass in front of them to allow for the mask to be off.

On the handing of the diplomas, there are two ways this portion can be done. The first way is that students still walk up on stage, but when approaching the President, must stay six feet away. There will be an “X” on the ground for both the President as well as the student to be socially distanced. President Sandoval will most likely need to wear gloves when handing diplomas to the students. There will be no handshaking. Both the student and the President will turn and face the camera, take a picture, and the student will proceed to walk off stage.

The second way this can be done is that, rather than students walking, students will have their diplomas already in hand. When their names are called, they will simply stand up in acknowledgment, then sit back down.

The reason for the two formats is to prepare for future restrictions. In this case, we will be prepared for looser or tighter restrictions.

Then will be the wrap-up of the graduation ceremony. Students will only be allowed to pick up their caps when the ceremony is over. Throwing will not be permitted to avoid grouping.

Resources

- ASUN
 - ASUN would be a crucial aspect for this ceremony. With their access to resources, materials, and knowledge, they would be able to assist in the physical needs as well as the management for the ceremony. I have already been in contact with an ASUN senator and have begun conversations with them on my idea and proposal.
- Student Services
 - Student Services has a large part to play for graduations and all student events. Their expertise in student events makes them a valuable resource, as well as one of the final deciders for this proposal. With extensive conversations and planning, I believe Student Services would be interested in this idea and help make it a reality.
- Student Organizations

- There are several student organizations such as the Entrepreneurship Club, Business Student Council, and more who are interested in assisting for an in-person graduation. Their resilience, knowledge, and passion make them very willing to work in supporting this proposal. As President of the Entrepreneurship Club and member of the Business Student Council, I see students in action, on a weekly basis, and it is remarkable to watch young leaders evolve.

With these organizations, the University of Nevada, Reno's Graduation ceremony will have all the necessary guidance and tools to make graduation possible.

Timeline for Execution

| Description | Start Date | End Date | Duration |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|----------|
| Graduation Approval through President Sandoval, Student Services, and ASUN | 03/05/21 | 03/26/21 | 3 weeks |
| Preparing and planning with the three entities | 03/26/21 | 04/16/21 | 3 weeks |
| Phase 1 Complete | | | |
| Reaching out to students and faculty of speeches | 04/01/21 | 04/17/21 | 2 weeks |
| Run 2 rehearsals with management team | 04/18/21 | 05/01/21 | 2 weeks |
| Send email to graduating students of formal and choreography of graduation | 04/18/21 | 05/01/21 | 2 weeks |
| Phase 2 Complete | | | |
| Final rehearsal | 05/12/21 | 05/12/21 | 1 day |
| Graduation | 05/13/21 | 05/13/21 | 1 day |