

Commencement turns into attracting big-name speakers

(CPS) — It's almost graduation time. For students, it is a time of saying goodbye to old friends and nervously stepping into the job market or on to the next college. For their schools, however, it is a time of racing to sign up the richest, most famous commencement speaker possible.

"The universities are all for it, it generates a lot of publicity for them," said John Palmer, president of the National Speakers Bureau, a Chicago-based agent for many prominent speakers.

"Schools get a big-name speaker for several purposes," he explained. "One is just to provide an interesting speaker for graduates and their parents. The other is to generate publicity."

In deciding whom to ask to speak, one Utah State University (USU) commencement committee member said schools keep an eye on both politics and money.

"The speaker should have the same politics as the university's administration, yet it should be a big enough name that it attract attention and bring in more donations to the university," said the committee member, who asked not to be named.

"That would make sense," said Priscilla Lewis of the Council for Aid to Education, a New York group that tracks donations to

schools. "If you choose someone controversial, it can have a negative impact. For example, if you have a speaker that alumni find offensive, it might effect their contributions," Lewis said.

Things can go wrong along the way. USU, for one, originally had magazine publisher and corporate bon vivant Malcolm Forbes scheduled to speak at its commencement ceremonies. Forbes passed away in March. In his stead USU managed to sign up Nobel laureate Manfred Eigen, a West German chemist, whose renown, while considerable in academic circles, doesn't match Forbes' in the corporate world of donation money to colleges.

Talking heads form televisions are among this year's most sought-after speakers. palmer noted multiple campus offer for Sam Donaldson, Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather, adding that some of his other clients like Adm. William Crowe and former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick also are in demand.

Palmer maintained that former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who had to cancel his last attempt at a campus tour because of student protests in the early 1980's, has been asked to speak at several schools this spring.

"But everybody," Palmer

added, "wants (Soviet leader Mikhail) Gorbachev. It's a really big deal."

Rumors are flying that Gorbachev will speak at Brown University's commencement May 28. While NSB's Palmer confirmed the date, Brown official refused to verify that Gorbachev would attend. The Associated Press reported April 6 that the Soviet will not go to Brown.

"Brown doesn't schedule outside speakers as such, and the university has no further comment," said spokesman Don Demaio.

Even though it would bring a lot of publicity to the university, most seniors don't seem upset that Gorbachev probably won't appear.

"The tradition at Brown is to have senior speakers," said senior Sondra Berger. "I like it that way. It's more representative of our class, and it's not just somebody preaching at us."

The Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C. would not comment.

President Bush, on the other hand, will speak at graduation ceremonies at the universities of South Carolina and Texas at Austin, as well as the Texas A&I University in Kingsville.

Texas A&I, in fact, hit pay dirt in the commencement competition when it also got U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos to appear

with Bush.

A&I President Mael Ibanez said he wrote a letter to Cavazos, who grew up in Kingsville, asking if he or Bush would speak at the ceremony. Cavazos reportedly convinced Bush, also from Texas, to speak. The secretary later decided that he would like to attend as well.

Kingsville has formed two committees — one to promote the university and another to promote the city — to prepare for the presidents visit.

"It's very exciting, not just for the campus, but also for the community. We will be putting our best foot forward," said Mary Sherwood, Texas A&M's assistant director of public affairs.

While it may be a great publicity event for the area, student's friends and families may be left out in the cold. For security reasons, the ceremony most likely will be held in a gym that seats only 4,000 people while only 300 students are graduating, newpeople and other observers will crowd out most of the graduates' families and other students who might like to attend.

"It's very likely that some people who want to attend won't be able to," Sherwood said.

Last year's graduation at Boston University, which featured Bush and French President Francois Mitterrand, had more of the atmosphere that surrounds the Super Bowl rather than an academic event. Because of the huge crowds expected — about 30,000 attended — each senior was allotted four tickets. Some enterprising students scalped their tickets for as much as \$100.

Florida State University students filed a class-action suit against

FSU April 2 to prevent that same thing from happening there. Even though there is no big-name speaker signed for the ceremony, the 3,500 seniors will receive four guest tickets each, and some are scalping their free tickets for \$60.

"A public institution of higher learning should not be allowed to create a black market for resale of tickets for admission to a public meeting held ostensibly for the purpose of honoring its new graduates," says the suit, which was filed in Leon County Circuit Court by seven students.

"It's for safety purposes only," said Susan Sheppard of FSU's ticket committee. "Last spring, there was about 4,000 people sitting in the aisles and there would have been no way to get out in case of an emergency."

Wesleyan University, on the other hand, holds its ceremonies on a big grassy field, and anybody who wants to attend may. This year, Archbishop Desmond Tutu will be the featured speaker.

While getting a speaker has become big business — costing anywhere from \$2,000 to \$20,000 depending on the popularity of the speaker — few administrators readily admit they want to attract attention to their school.

"I don't get a sense that it is a competition," said William Holder, who was part of the committee to bring Tutu to Wesleyan. "Each university wants to get somebody who can make the event memorable and meaningful."

A&I, however isn't bashful about trying to draw attention to the university. "We certainly hope this will attract potential students," Sherwood said.

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Circus Circus VP to teach communications course

Glen Schaeffer, executive vice president and chief financial officer for Circus Circus Enterprises, Inc., will teach "The Rhetoric of Business" (COS 409) this fall.

According to Schaeffer, "Many aspiring 'communication professionals' lack a competent grounding in the historical themes and basic paradigms of the business corporation." This course will focus on the "culture" of business, sampling from texts such as "Wealth of Nations," Franklin's "Autobiography," "My Years at General Motors," "Working," and "Unsafe At Any Speed."

Schaeffer received his M.A. in literature from UC Irvine, and was subsequently admitted to the Iowa Writer's Workshop at the Univer-

sity of Iowa, where he earned an M.F.A. in professional writing. As an account executive and public relations specialist, he worked for Hill and Knowlton, Inc., a leading international public relations firm. He also worked for Ramada before joining Circus Circus, Inc.

According to Gage Chapel, chair of the department, "It is very seldom someone specializing in PR would become chief financial officer of a major corporation. We are pleased to have a man with his unique talents teaching a communications course."

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