Bryan Series: a frequently missed student opportunity

When I signed up to cover Robert Gates' presentation at the Bryan Series, I didn't know what to expect. Surrounded by people in suit-and-tie and dresses, I felt underdressed in my jeans. I tried to find a fellow Guilford student, but other than a Guilfordian photographer and a friend, I couldn't find anyone else.

When I attended the Elizabeth Alexander presentation, the lack of Guilford students felt even greater, as I didn't have a photographer with me.

BY VALERIA SOSA
Staff Writer

Throughout both presentations, I couldn't help but wonder, "Where is everyone?"

"There is a lot of competition for students' time, both academic and nonacademic," said Kent Chabotar, president and professor of political science. "People complain that there is nothing to do. But if you look at all the activities for one day, there is a lot to do."

Like, you know, attend the Bryan Series. Tickets are free. Transportation is provided. What else do you want?

"If you don't have a lot of work to do, then why not?" said Early College junior Thomas Barnett. "You have nothing better to do."

The most popular event with students this year was the Robert Gates presentation with 56 tickets distributed, and the least, Elizabeth Alexander with a paltry 11.

Keep in mind, not all the tickets distributed are used.

Student sessions with speakers are held around 3 p.m. the day of the Bryan Series presentation at the Community Center, so even if you can't make it to the night lecture, you can still meet the speaker. This is an on-campus event, yet even fewer students attend the evening sessions.

The Bryan Series is not only free for students, professors, and faculty, but it brings undeniably distinguished speakers to Guilford, something many large universities do not have.
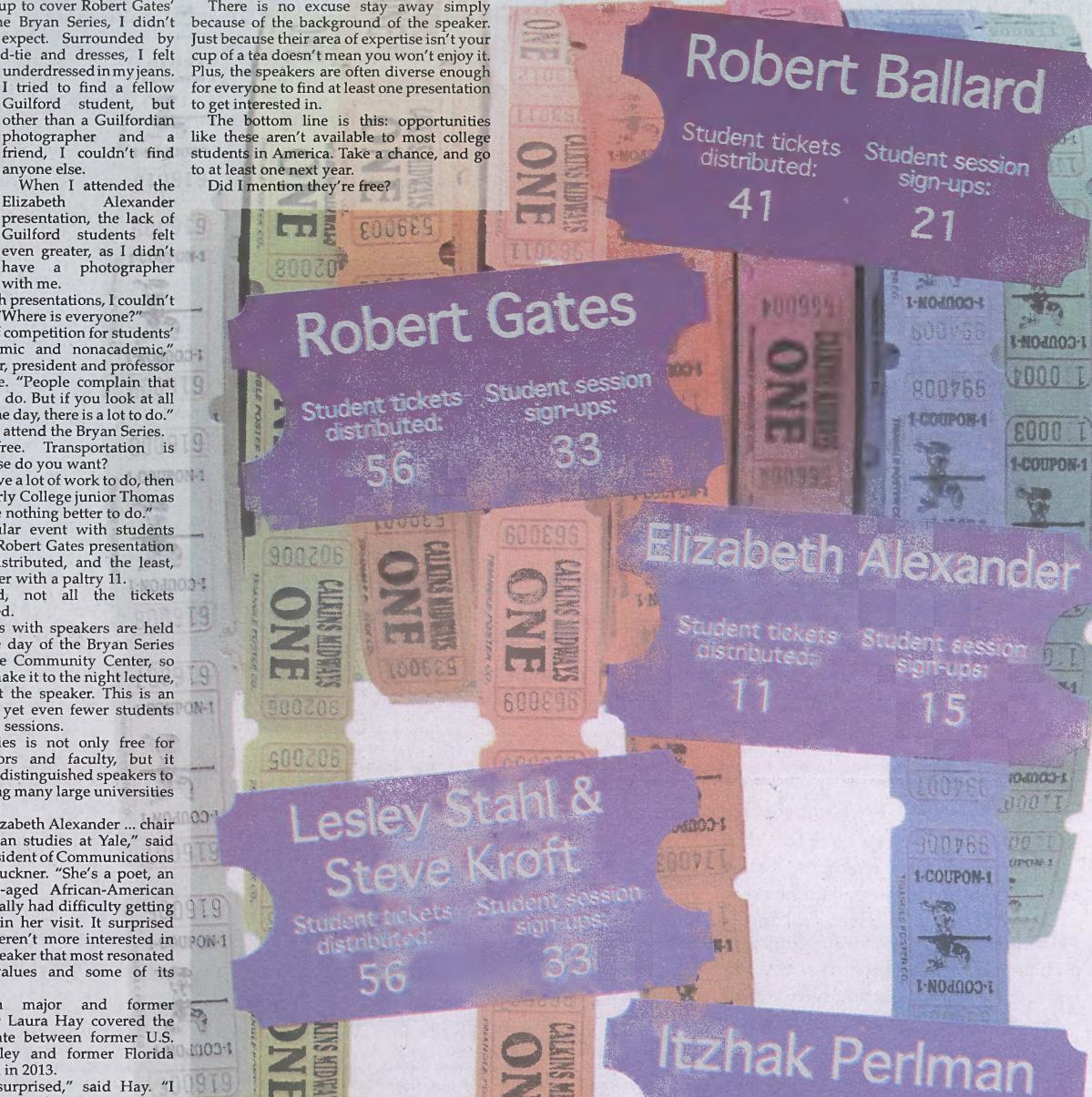
"We brought Elizabeth Alexander ... chair of African American studies at Yale," said Associate Vice President of Communications & Marketing Ty Buckner. "She's a poet, an author, a middle-aged African-American woman, and we really had difficulty getting people interested in her visit. It surprised me that people weren't more interested in her. She was the speaker that most resonated Guilford's core values and some of its commitments."

Senior English major and former Guilfordian writer Laura Hay covered the Bryan Series debate between former U.S. Senator Bill Bradley and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush in 2013.

"I was nicely surprised," said Hay. "I thought it would get ugly and aggressive, but it didn't at all.

"I did notice that there was a lack of young people at the Bryan Series. It's a great opportunity. You don't have to go to all of them, but at least try it once."

Previous Bryan Speakers include prominent politicians and heads of state, journalists, musicians, poets, authors and scientists, among others.

There is no excuse stay away simply because of the background of the speaker. Just because their area of expertise isn't your cup of a tea doesn't mean you won't enjoy it. Plus, the speakers are often diverse enough for everyone to find at least one presentation to get interested in.

The bottom line is this: opportunities like these aren't available to most college students in America. Take a chance, and go to at least one next year.

Did I mention they're free?

Robert Ballard
Student tickets distributed: 41
Student session sign-ups: 21

Robert Gates
Student tickets distributed: 56
Student session sign-ups: 33

Elizabeth Alexander
Student tickets distributed: 11
Student session sign-ups: 15

Lesley Stahl & Steve Kroft
Student tickets distributed: 56
Student session sign-ups: 33

Itzhak Perlman
Student tickets distributed: 12
Student session sign-ups: No student session

Courtesy of TrianglePoster.com

Lack of transparency necessary for presidential search

The presidential search was just that: a search. A question. An unknown. In itself a mystery, it's no wonder that the entire ordeal seemed hushed and under-explained on campus.

Though more communication would have helped ease people's concerns, confidentiality on behalf of the candidates was necessary and important for the presidential search.

BY NELLIE VINOGRAD
Staff Writer

For a high-profile position like the president of a college, confidentiality is expected for many reasons. Candidates could get into trouble with current employers or risk harming their reputation if they don't receive the position. Increased circulation of information and more transparency also would have overwhelmed the dialogue and possibly intimidated candidates from applying.

"The confidentiality was intended to protect the candidates, not exclude the community," said Kami Rowan, associate professor of music and member of the search committee. "By respecting the candidates' privacy, it made the search a pure process with integrity."

One issue of transparency we fortunately didn't have to deal with was private interviews for the final candidates, which they had the right to request. In this regard, the community was downright lucky, as the ability for students and faculty to access and give feedback on the candidates was not always a given.

With a highly-representative search committee — including students, faculty and board of trustees members — the community was able make sure their input was heard throughout the year as well. Online surveys were also sent out to gain feedback on what people wanted out of the candidates.

"The community had a lot of access in the final process and a lot more than is typically done at other institutions," said Dave Dobson, professor of geology and earth sciences and a member of the committee.

At this point, the committee can still only discuss a few details about the process and can't give further information about candidates, according to Jessica Hilliard, CCE junior and committee member. Throughout the year, committee members were only able to discuss certain aspects of the search process and could not reveal any personal details about the candidates.

"We would all want to be given that respect," Hilliard said. "What you have to think about is this: if I applied for a job, would I want them to tell everyone that I didn't get it?"

The process could have been aided by having more student and faculty sessions and an extended final interview process. Many students were unable to make the 11 a.m. student sessions, as they had class or were busy during this time.

More communication about why the confidentiality was necessary and increased updates throughout the year about the process would have helped placate the feelings of suspicion and secrecy that went along with the search.

"It wasn't very transparent, but the president is a pretty important position, and I don't know if transparency would have been efficient," junior Jon Macemore said. "I think it would have dragged on the process."

Though it wasn't the most open process, the presidential search was effective and legitimate. Hopefully, though, the mystery will be revealed soon.