

COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS

# Diversity of HBCU speakers in upcoming commencements

BY CASH MICHAELS FOR THE CHRONICLE

Once again, black families in the Triad and Triangle that have students graduating from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are preparing for May commencement exercises, where leaders in the fields of business, education, politics and entertainment come to deliver keynote addresses to new graduates about the world that awaits them, and how they should handle it.

Winston-Salem State University's 2017 Commencement, scheduled for Bowman Gray Stadium on Saturday, May 19 at 9:45 a.m. will feature noted attorney and CNN political commentator Bakari Sellers as the keynote speaker.

He made history in 2006 as the youngest African American elected official in the nation. At age 22, Sellers defeated a 26-year incumbent state representative to become the youngest member of the South Carolina State Legislature, serving from



Higginbotham



Adams



Ali



Morgan



Joyner



Mitchell

2006-14. In 2014, he was the Democratic nominee for South Carolina lieutenant governor. More recently, he has served as a political commentator and analyst for CNN and MSNBC.

His father is civil rights leader and educator Dr. Cleveland Sellers.

Sellers practices law with the Strom Law Firm in Columbia, South Carolina. He is married to Dr. Ellen Rucker-Sellers.

The ceremony will recognize more than 1,200 graduates who received their degrees during summer and fall 2016 and spring 2017. This includes:

\*More than 1,100 undergraduates.

\*129 graduates (master's and doctoral).

\*Three post-graduate certificates.

The ceremony will be held, weather permitting, at Bowman Gray Stadium. The rain location is Winston-Salem's Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum. For those who cannot attend, the ceremony will be live-streamed on WSSU's website: [www.wssu.edu](http://www.wssu.edu).

At Bennett College in Greensboro, a familiar face will deliver the commencement address on Saturday, May 6. U.S. Rep. Alma Adams (D-12-NC), who had previously taught art at the all-female HBCU for over 40 years, will be speaking during the 10 a.m. ceremony on the campus quadrangle. Rep. Adams formerly served in

the N.C. House for many years, before being elected to Congress in 2014. She will speak at 10 a.m. in The Quadrangle on the Bennett campus.

Visitors are also welcomed at Baccalaureate Exercises, which begin at 7 p.m. on May 5 inside the Annie Merner Pfeiffer Chapel on campus. The Rev. Dr. Daran H. Mitchell, senior pastor of Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and President of The Pulpit Forum of Greensboro, will deliver the Baccalaureate address.

In the event of inclement weather, Commencement will be held inside the Annie Merner Pfeiffer Chapel on Bennett's campus.

A few miles away on Saturday, May 13, N.C. Agricultural and Technical State University will welcome undefeated boxing champion, author and TV hostess Laila Ali, daughter of legendary champion Muhammad Ali, as the keynote speaker during the main commencement ceremony, beginning at 8:30 a.m. at the Greensboro Coliseum Complex.

Ms. Ali, born in 1977 to her father and Veronica Porsche Ali, began her boxing career at the age of 18, turning pro at age 22. She retired undefeated after eight years with a record of 24-0. Her world-renowned father died less than a year ago at age 74.

In Durham, the 2017 Spring Commencement for

North Carolina Central University (NCCU) undergraduates in O'Kelly-Riddick Stadium on Saturday, May 13 at 8 a.m. will feature retired astronaut Joan Higginbotham. She spent 308 hours in space during the Space Shuttle Discovery mission in 2006, making her the third African-American woman ever to travel in space. Currently she is a Lowes Companies Inc. executive and serves on the NCCU Board of Trustees.

On Friday evening May 12, Justice Mike Morgan of the N.C. Supreme Court will address the NCCU Graduate and Professional Commencement Ceremony in McDougald-McLendon Arena. Justice Morgan is an alumnus of the NCCU School of Law.

Nationally syndicated radio host Tom Joyner will be the keynoter for Shaw University's 2017 Commencement exercises Saturday, May 13 at the Raleigh Convention Center starting at 10 a.m.

Chronicle reports contributed to this report.

# Historian Jon Meacham to deliver 2017 Commencement Address at WFU

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Pulitzer Prize-winning author and presidential historian Jon Meacham will deliver Wake Forest University's commencement address on Monday, May 15.

Wake Forest's commencement ceremony is a ticketed event reserved for graduates, their families and guests and is not open to the public. The ceremony takes place on Hearn Plaza at 9 a.m.

A livestream webcast of the ceremony will be available at [go.wfu.edu/wfu17](http://go.wfu.edu/wfu17).

Meacham is the author of highly acclaimed biographies of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and George H.W. Bush.

Meacham's most recent book, "Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush," became a #1 New York Times bestseller. In 2009, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his bestseller "American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House." His other national bestsellers include: "Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power,"

"Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship" and "American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation."

Meacham is currently at work on a biography of James and Dolley Madison.

"Jon Meacham has the ability to analyze contemporary politics through the eyes of an historian," said Wake Forest University President Nathan O. Hatch. "There is no better time for us to understand and appreciate how the past informs our future. We are honored he will deliver Wake Forest's commencement address."

A member of the Council on Foreign Relations and of the Society of American Historians, Meacham is a distinguished visiting professor at Vanderbilt University and at The University of the South. He is a contributing editor at TIME magazine, a contributing writer to The New York Times Book Review and a former executive editor at Random House.

A commentator on politics, history and religious faith in America, Meacham is



Meacham

also a regular guest on MSNBC's "Morning Joe," "Charlie Rose" and other broadcasts. Meacham was the editor of Newsweek from 2006 to 2010. He is a former editor of The Washington Monthly and began his journalism career at The Chattanooga Times. Meacham chairs the National Advisory Council of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University.

A livestream webcast of the ceremony will be available at [go.wfu.edu/wfu17](http://go.wfu.edu/wfu17).

**Baccalaureate information**

Also joining Wake Forest for the com-

mencement weekend will be Baccalaureate speaker Kathy "Killian" Noe ('80), founder of the Recovery Café in Seattle, Washington. She was awarded Wake Forest University's Distinguished Alumni Award in 2015 and was featured in the Spring 2017 issue of Wake Forest Magazine.

Baccalaureate will take place Sunday, May 14, at 9 a.m. in Wait Chapel. Like commencement, baccalaureate is a ticketed event reserved for graduates, their families and guests and is not open to the general public.

A livestream webcast of the service will be available at <http://go.wfu.edu/bacc17>.

As the founding director of Recovery Café and co-founder of Samaritan Inns in Washington, D.C., she's helped thousands of people rebuild shattered lives. The Recovery Café model has been replicated in five other cities and efforts are underway to launch Recovery Cafés nationwide.

# Prolific actor and alumnus Tim Guinee to speak at UNCSCA high school graduation

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Alumnus Tim Guinee, a prolific actor with more than 300 stage, television and film roles to his credit, will be the speaker for High School Commencement at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSCA).

He will speak to 120 graduates and their families in a ceremony at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 13 at the Stevens Center in downtown Winston-Salem. Commencement is not open to the public.

"Tim Guinee's varied and impressive career illustrates an important message for our graduates: Your arts-based education will take you wherever you want to go," said Chancellor Lindsay Bierman. "As they head off to college or to begin their careers, our high school graduates will carry his words of inspiration, along with our very best wishes."

Known for his dramatic range, Guinee graduated



Guinee

from UNCSCA in 1985 and made his feature film debut the next year as Cullum Struan in the epic "Tai-Pan."

His theatre work includes "SubUrbia" at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, "Richard II" (directed by Joseph Papp) and "Twelfth Night" at the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Some of his more recognized film work includes characters in "Sweet Land"

(winner, Film Independent Spirit Award), Ramin Bahrani's "99 Homes," "Iron Man 1" and "Iron Man 2," "Personal Velocity," "Promised Land," "Synecdoche New York," and "Courage Under Fire."

He was in visionary French director Rachid Bouchareb's two most recent films, "Just Like a Woman" and "Two Men in Town."

On television he was a series regular on AMC's western "Hell On Wheels" (with UNCSCA alumna Jennifer Ferrin) and has recurred on many programs including "Homeland," "The Good Wife," "Elementary," "Bones," "Revolution," "24," and "Strange World."

Guinee has directed theatre and film, including the multiple award-winning short, "One Armed Man."

He has lived and/or worked on every continent except for Antarctica.

For more information, visit [www.uncsa.edu](http://www.uncsa.edu).

# Utilities commissioner to speak at Forsyth Tech commencement

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Commissioner Lyons Gray, North Carolina Utilities Commission and former N.C. Secretary of Revenue, will speak at Forsyth Tech Graduation 5 pm, Tuesday, May 9 at Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum, 2825 University Parkway.

About 1,160 Forsyth Tech students will receive associate degrees, certificates and diplomas that signify completion of their programs of study during the 2017 commencement exercises.

Forsyth Tech provides students with

flexible educational pathways to a competitive workforce for the community and global economy. The college offers associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates in more than 200 programs of study, including programs that promote personal and professional development through non-credit courses and seminars, as well as customized training for business and industry.

Forsyth Tech is the fifth largest community college in North Carolina and serves more than 35,000 students with approximately 1,500 full and part-time faculty and staff.

# New principal chosen for The Downtown School

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Andrew Lester-Niles will be the new principal at the Downtown School.

Lester-Niles served as principal at Vienna Elementary School since 2015. Prior to that, he was the assistant principal at Brunson Elementary School, starting there in 2003. He also served as a Principal Fellow Intern at Vienna Elementary and Wiley Middle School, a supervisor of Student Teachers at The University of North Carolina at

Greensboro, and was an Exceptional Children's Teacher at Whitaker Elementary School.

Lester-Niles earned a bachelor's degree in Special Education from Appalachian State University, and a master's degree from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Lester-Niles replaces Jan Atkinson, who is retiring at the end of this school year. Atkinson has been with the district for 34 years, 20 years as the principal at the Downtown School.



Andrew Lester-Niles