

N.C. schools plan commencement ceremonies

BY SOPHIE SANDERS
STAFF WRITER

While UNC-Chapel Hill students have come to expect prestigious commencement speakers, some UNC-system schools have other priorities when it comes to planning their commencement ceremonies.

Some have done away with speakers altogether, while others have tried to maintain a local focus.

And while UNC-CH begins the planning more than a year in advance, the timeline for other uni-

versities is very different. UNC-Wilmington has eliminated commencement speakers because of the sheer size of its student body, said Dana Fischetti, manager of news and media relations.

Last year, the school held three separate graduation ceremonies to accommodate the senior class. In fall 2007, the university enrolled 10,640 undergraduate students.

Instead of having a speaker, students opted to have all of their names read, Fischetti said. They only

wanted a big-name speaker which the school could not afford for three separate ceremonies.

"That level of speaker is particularly expensive," Fischetti said, explaining that students requested speakers like Oprah Winfrey, who will be speaking at Duke University's 2009 commencement.

At Appalachian State University, the deans choose a separate speaker for each degree-earning school's individual ceremony, said Jane Nicholson, university news director.

"It's usually someone who has a connection to the field of study or the college," Nicholson said, citing last year's business school speaker, an alumnus who worked for Smith Barney in the Charlotte area.

UNC-Greensboro emphasizes a local connection when looking for a speaker, said Karen Haywood, the associate university registrar for communications, commencement and curriculum.

Last year's selected commencement speaker was the former chair

of the Board of Trustees at UNC-G, who now serves as the president of Davidson College.

Neither UNC-G nor ASU announces their decision until April or May.

At UNC-CH, students have almost a full academic year to anticipate their speaker, which the committee spends months lining up.

"It took a year-long discussion," said Ronald Strauss, executive associate provost, of the choice to invite Desmond Tutu, adding that

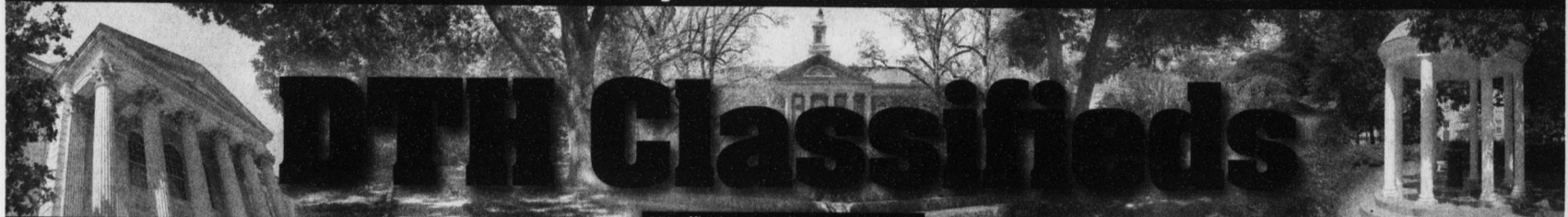
discussions began last spring. Their job is made easier by the fact that, as a prestigious university, UNC-CH is an easy sell to the speakers, Strauss said.

Although the University covers travel expenses, they do not pay the speaker, he said.

"They come because they want to come. That's the good news," Strauss said.

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