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In the past three years, campus attendance at Bryan Series lectures has decreased from 300 to 75, according to a list of attendance estimates for the events since 2001. Guilford students aren't attending the lectures and the organizers are wondering why.

The Bryan Series is a gift from namesake Joseph M. Bryan Jr. Bryan, an alumnus and current chair of the college's board of trustees, set up an endowed fund to be used to hire speakers.

The annual sum of money Guilford receives from this fund is to be used only for speakers, with an aim to honor the arts, humanities, and public affairs.

"I will be the first to tell you," says Director of College Relations Ty Buckner, "not every speaker is a household name. We use the input of the faculty, Joe Bryan, and the students, to keep the series academically oriented."

Buckner, who is one of the the program's organizers, sees a strong integrity in the program. He emphasizes that the program's purpose is educational.

Though the series provides good publicity for the college and is designed to appeal to a wide range of people all around the city, the true goal is education. Speakers are never hired for pure entertainment.

"I want to emphasize," said philosophy profesor Jonathan Malino, another key organizer in an e-mail, "what an extraordinary opportunity the Bryan Series offers both the entire Guilford community and the wider Greensboro community. The speakers are not ones we normally have access to in our lives."

Buckner and his colleagues try to get people that attract a diverse crowd. There is always one speaker that headlines the program - Mikhail Gorbachev for this year- and several others that adhere to the current Guilford theme. These others are meant to attract all possible audiences.

In the fall of '03, College Relations circulated two audience surveys to determine popular speakers for the future. "We want feedback," says Buckner, "I don't want to make decisions in a vacuum."

The importance of connecting to the community is shown when the college hosts Bryan Series lectures off-campus. These are the events that get the most attendance.

According to Buckner, transportation is free to students for off-site events, and no one ever has to pay for these lectures. With this in mind, other reasons for the lack of attendance by Guilford students must be explored. "I don't go just because I don't have the time," says first-year Amy



Bryan speakers in 2004 included former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev



Another 2004 visitor was Cokie Roberts

Phillips.

Buckner believes that it may be the phrase, "lecture," that turns some off to the Bryan Series. But those that have attended can vouch for the fact that the events are more than that. There is always a question-answer session where you get an opportunity that students elsewhere may not have.

One possibility is the receding novelty of the program, says Buckner. In March of 2002 when Ralph Nader spoke, Dana auditorium was almost filled - a venue with 1000 seats. In March 2003 when Robert F. Kennedy Jr. spoke, the group was small but enthusiastic. Turnouts since then seem to have steadily decreased.

The organizers of the series see this, and they are working toward a solution by studying input from surveys. At the Michael Beschloss event on February 10, another survey of the audience will be taken. "It's a living, ongoing effort," says Buckner, "We will continue to try to improve on it and keep it fresh. There are so many competing programs at Guilford, we have to keep it appealing and vibrant."

If students have any ideas for a Bryan Series speaker, they can submit them to the Bryan Series page on the Guilford website.