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Furman tops in graduation rates among highly competitive schools in South

Furman University

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In appreciation of Mr. G., students fund the trip of a lifetime

Pat Grills had spent his 37-year teaching career telling students about the art treasures of Europe.

Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Picasso . . . Grills would describe the great works while sharing their back stories, analyzing the artists' techniques, explaining the works' meaning and placing them in historical context.

He knew all about them. After all, he was a 1972 Furman graduate with a degree in art — and a master's to boot.

The only catch: He'd never actually seen them.

Barbara Laffler, a substitute teacher at Greenville's Riverside High where Grills heads the fine arts department, considered this an injustice. She had long thought that, given his knowledge of art history and his love for the subject, Mr. G. deserved to experience the masterpieces in person.

So she enlisted the help of a big Mr. G. fan, Riverside senior Alex Waelde. They arranged with Bank of America to start a "Send Mr. G. to Europe" account. They even had a Web site: <http://sendmrgtoeurope.com>.

And somehow, they kept it all a secret from Mr. G.

Throughout the 2008-09 school year, money poured in. Joey Thompson, now a student at the University of South Carolina, joined Laffler and Waelde as lead conspirators. By the spring their efforts had raised more than \$10,000.

Obviously, Mr. G. was going to Europe. But how to break the news?

Opportunity arose at the Riverside art show April 27. More than 400 of Grills' students, past and present, were in the audience to see the teacher's stunned — and grateful — reaction.

As he told *The Greenville News*, "This kind of thing just doesn't happen to a schoolteacher. It doesn't happen to anybody."

Grills' fans aren't restricted to Riverside, however.

He has been a popular teacher with Furman's Lifelong Learning and Bridges to a Brighter Future programs for many years, sharing his

knowledge and appreciation of art with hundreds.

Now, he's ready to see firsthand the master works he knows so much about. He and his wife, Cathy Whitehill Grills '73 (also a Bridges teacher), plan to take their trip next summer.

"I want to see all of it," he says.



Grills with some of his own art and his trademark art history ties

JEREMY FLEMING

Furman tops in graduation rates among highly competitive schools in South

Furman leads the South in graduation rates among "highly competitive" four-year colleges, according to a study recently released by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

The AEI, a non-profit think tank in Washington, D.C., reports that Furman's graduation rate of 83 percent puts the school at the top of public and private institutions deemed highly competitive in the South. The University of Florida is next at 81 percent, followed by the

University of the South (Sewanee), Clemson and Georgia Tech, all at 78 percent.

The report, "Diplomas and Dropouts: Which Colleges Actually Graduate Their Students (and Which Don't)," divided more than 1,300 institutions into regions of the country and into six categories: most competitive, highly competitive, very competitive, competitive, less competitive and non-competitive.

The report said that highly competitive colleges usually accept between one-third and

half of their applicants. The students they enroll typically carried at least a B or B+ grade-point average in high school and were usually ranked in the top 35 percent of their graduating class.

The most competitive institutions graduate, on average, 88 percent of their students, while non-competitive ones graduate 35 percent.

The AEI advises prospective students and their parents to thoroughly examine a school's graduation rate when looking at colleges. The report is available at www.aei.org/paper/100019.