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Commencement: Grads to step to podium

Furman University

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With the South Carolina State House reflected in his tuba, a member of the Furman Symphonic Band performs during inauguration ceremonies for Governor Mark Sanford '83. Sarah Reese '71 also performed at the inaugural, backed by the Furman Singers and choirs from the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts. After the formal ceremonies, Sanford greeted the public at a down-home barbecue.

Commencement: Grads to step to podium

Wanted: Two clever, glib, quick-witted seniors to deliver the speech of a lifetime. No experience necessary. Guaranteed audience in the thousands. Nervous Nellies need not apply.

Such might be the job description the senior class sends out this spring when it launches the hunt for two worthy graduates-to-be to speak at Commencement.

That's right. Instead of a leading scholar, or a wealthy donor, or a politician in love with his or her own voice, two graduating students will step to the podium May 31 to enlighten, cajole, entertain and inspire their classmates at the conclusion of their college years.

The proposal was endorsed fall term by the Association of Furman Students and approved by the President's Council, in part because of past complaints about long-winded speakers with little name recognition or connection to Furman. And the plan is not unprecedented; many other institutions ask students to headline graduation ceremonies.

A committee consisting of the vice president for student services, three representatives of the faculty and administrative staff, and the presidents of the junior and sophomore classes will select the speakers. Auditions will be held in April; the committee will look for the individuals who can deliver the most entertaining speech. No other criteria (grades, extracurricular activities, popularity) will be considered, other than that the candidates be on course to graduate on time.

As Jeff Sirolly, president of the Class of 2003, told *The Paladin*, "We will see how it goes, and if it's an awful experience, then they can revise it next year. But I'm graduating this year, and I'm excited about it."

Sanford takes command as S.C. governor

The evidence seems clear: Mark Sanford was born to lead.

When he attended Furman in the early 1980s, he was president of the Association of Furman Students (AFS). From 1994-2000, he served three terms as a South Carolina Congressman, representing Charleston and the coastal counties.

Today, he is settling into the South Carolina governor's office.

Sanford, a Republican, was elected the state's 82nd governor on November 5, defeating incumbent Democrat Jim Hodges. His inauguration took place in Columbia January 15.

A member of Furman's Class of '83, Sanford is the second Furman graduate to hold the state's highest elected office. Democrat Richard W. Riley '54 served from 1979 to 1987. (Irba Charles Blackwood, governor from 1931 to 1935, attended Furman but graduated from Wofford College. John Calhoun Sheppard, the state's acting governor for one year in 1885, also attended Furman but did not graduate.)

Sanford, who holds an M.B.A. degree from the Darden School at the University of Virginia, brings expertise as a businessman and developer to the governor's office. He's taking over in the midst of a budget crisis, which hasn't been helped by stagnant economic growth. As a result, there are concerns about providing adequate funding for public services, education and health care for children, the elderly and the disabled.

Still, he seems prepared to deal realistically with the state's problems. During his years in Congress, Sanford received high marks for his personal style, accessibility and attentiveness



to constituents. While he campaigned for the governorship on a platform of change — including lowering income taxes and restructuring state government — he has also indicated a determination to act prudently.

As he has said, "When making change, in every instance, we'll deal with problems as they're before us, straight-up, look you in the eye, and then offer a solution. And then if that solution is not right, [we'll] be a good listener, with the voters of South Carolina and the legislative leaders of South Carolina, to find solutions that do work."

One major state newspaper has described Sanford as "intelligent, humble and shrewd" — traits he no doubt developed during his days at Furman. They'll come in handy as he confronts the challenges of governing his home state.