

Commencement tests new, student-friendly format

MSU is experimenting with a new spring commencement format that will speed up the process and provide tickets to all friends and relatives.

By Robb Murray, Free Press Staff Writer [published in The Free Press, Mankato, MN 4/18/2005]

MANKATO — Minnesota State University is experimenting with a new spring commencement format that will eliminate the keynote speaker, speed up the process and make sure no gets shut out because they couldn't get a ticket.

The event also will move from the Midwest Wireless Civic Center back to campus. Three ceremonies - scheduled for May 14 - will be held at 9 a.m., noon and 3 p.m.

"There was a sense that we had really outgrown the civic center," said Scott Olson, MSU's vice president for academic affairs.

University officials say there are four advantages to breaking up the ceremony into three smaller ones.

Each ceremony will be shorter than if they were all bunched together, the event will come back to campus after several years at the Midwest Wireless Civic Center, there will be no limit to the number of family members allowed and each ceremony will be more personal and intimate.

Arts and Humanities and Science, Engineering and Technology graduates have the 9 a.m. slot. Graduating at noon will be students in the colleges of Business and Education. Last are the students in the colleges of Allied Health and Nursing and Social and Behavioral Sciences.

"It is our belief," Olson told faculty in a memo issued earlier this month, "that the changes will be very positive and that everyone's experience of the event will be enhanced."

Under the old system, commencement ceremonies had gone on for more than three hours. The new system aims to keep each one at just over an hour and a half.

As of last week, 1,649 undergraduate and graduate students were on track to graduate on May 14 in the ceremonies. A record 1,617 MSU students graduated in Spring 2004, so this year's spring commencement probably will set a new record.

Olson said parking will be easier, students will be able to show parents around the campus and students will be the featured speakers, not a politician or university officials.

The only possible drawback, Olson said, would be that the new format won't allow for the feeling of a massive, traditional commencement. But so far there have been no complaints, and they're confident people will appreciate getting out earlier and with far less hassle than previous years.