

University selects 'star' physicist for fall convocation

James Gates has gained notoriety for his scientific speeches to non-scientists

BY EVA SYLWESTER
NEWS REPORTER

The University has changed the format of its annual fall convocation ceremonies and has selected physicist James Gates to speak at the Sept. 25 event.

In 2002, the University initiated the New Student Convocation, an event to welcome new students on the Sunday afternoon before classes start. This meeting was in addition to the older Convocation, generally held in October and intended for the whole University community, said Karen Sprague, biology professor and vice provost of undergraduate studies.

Sprague said the decision was made last Tuesday to merge the two events for fall 2005, due to low student attendance at Convocation.

"The goal is to combine the best features of both programs," Sprague said.

Faculty members' donning of graduation-style caps and gowns is one feature that will carry over from Convocation. The event will also include music and the introduction of new faculty members.

Both ceremonies have traditionally emphasized the presence of a visiting speaker. Gates is the John S. Toll Professor of Physics and the director of the Center for String and Particle Theory at the University of Maryland.

Gates said he first spoke about science to non-scientists in 1988



LAURE WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Physicist James Gates will speak at the University's convocation ceremony in September.

when the department chair asked him to give a public speech at a department-hosted celebration called Super Physics Day.

"My first response was, 'You're crazy. It cannot be done,'" Gates said.

Despite his initial trepidation, the talk was well-received and Gates has since given many other such speeches. Gates has had an especially busy year because of events taking place around the world in honor of the United Nations-endorsed World Year of Physics 2005.

Gates said that over years of public speaking, he has discovered how to

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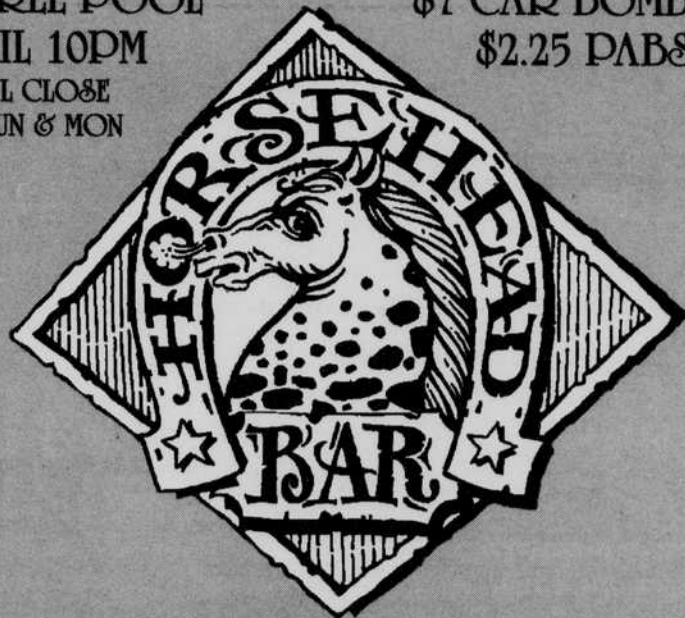
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