



Class Day History

Class Day provides an opportunity for seniors to stage their own graduation exercises. The Class Day ceremony is planned and presented by the members of the senior class. Although it varies from year to year, the event traditionally gives seniors an opportunity to acknowledge publicly achievements and contributions of members of the class and University community.

The program includes the awarding of various prizes to classmates, student speeches, a review of the class history, presentation of the key to campus by the president of the University and honorary class member inductions. Honorary class membership typically is granted to individuals whom the graduates feel have shaped their Princeton experience or touched their lives in some way. The Class Day ceremony ends with the singing of Princeton's alma mater, "Old Nassau."

By tradition, the event is held the day before Commencement on Cannon Green behind Nassau Hall. According to the University Archives, a formal Class Day was held as early as 1856, and in 1898 it was described as "a day over which the Graduating Class has full charge and which we run to suit ourselves, in our characteristic way."

While the president of the University presides over Commencement and typically gives the Commencement address, the graduating class selects its speaker for Class Day. The speaker is selected by the Class Day co-chairs in consultation with the elected class officers. Until the recent past, speakers were administrators, members of the faculty, prominent alumni and others with a Princeton connection (such as a Princeton parent). This trend started to change in 2001, when the senior class made history by selecting actor and comedian Bill Cosby, who had no affiliation with the University.

The selection of speakers has evolved to include prominent individuals who have something to offer that the class wants to hear. While the goal at times is to be entertained, the class also chooses speakers based on an interest in an individual's distinct point of view about current issues.

Timeline of speakers:

- 2013 — David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker* since 1998, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and a 1981 Princeton alumnus
- 2012 — Steve Carell, actor of the "The Office" TV show and films including "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," "Date Night" and "Crazy, Stupid, Love"
- 2011 — Brooke Shields, actress of "The Blue Lagoon," "Suddenly Susan" and "Lipstick Jungle," and a 1987 Princeton alumna
- 2010 — Charles Gibson, anchor of ABC's "World News" from 2006 to 2009, a 1965 Princeton alumnus and a member of Princeton's board of trustees from 2006 to 2010

- 2009 — Katie Couric, anchor and managing editor of "CBS Evening News"
- 2008 — Stephen Colbert, comedian and satirist of "The Colbert Report"
- 2007 — Bradley Whitford, actor of "The West Wing" and "Studio 360"
- 2006 — Bill Clinton, former president of the United States
- 2005 — Chevy Chase, actor and comedian of "Caddyshack" and the "National Lampoon's Vacation" series of movies
- 2004 — Jon Stewart, comedian and satirist of "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart"
- 2003 — Jerry Seinfeld, comedian and actor of the "Seinfeld" TV show
- 2002 — James Baker, former U.S. Secretary of State and 1952 Princeton alumnus
- 2001 — Bill Cosby, actor and comedian of "The Cosby Show"
- Prior to 2001 — Speakers typically were alumni, faculty or senior administrators of the University

The Class Day order of events includes a senior procession, with the class officers leading the class onto Cannon Green, or, in case of severe weather, into Jadwin Gym; the Class Day ceremony; and a senior class lunch. Seniors wear class jackets they receive as part of their transition to becoming alumni.