

TED's intellectual circus of ideas to come to SMU in October

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By Cheryl Hall

Southern Methodist University is bringing a TED-like event called **TEDxSMU** to campus in October, and TEDsters are elated.

Interpretation is probably needed here.

TED, which stands for technology, entertainment, design is a small, New York-based nonprofit owned by the Sapling Foundation.

Devotees, known as TEDsters, pay thousands of dollars to attend annual convocations in Long Beach, Calif., and Oxford, England. Speakers have included Bill Gates, chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall, Al Gore, Michelle Obama and Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point*.

Think of it as an intellectual circus for ideas. Presenters don't lecture but rather amaze, entertain and present ideas in 18 minutes or less. These high-energy performances are videotaped. Go online to www.TED.com, and you'll get a feel for what happens.

TED2010 in Long Beach is sold out at \$6,000 per attendee, and it's 201 days away.

So earlier this year, TED authorized local, self-organized events called TEDx's.

TEDxSMU on Oct. 9 and 10 will explore "What Will Change Everything?"

Geoffrey Orsak, dean of the Bobby B. Lyle School of Engineering, and Jim Young, a retired Electronic Data Systems Corp. executive, are ardent TEDsters and the event's driving forces. They admit it's an audacious topic, but that's in keeping with TED's mantra of "ideas worth spreading."

Young has attended 19 TEDs since the first event 25 years ago. Orsak is newly indoctrinated. His first event was a simulcast of TED2009 in Palm Beach, Calif., in February.

"I spent \$6,000 to watch a conference on TV in another city, and it was the greatest experience of my professional life," Orsak says. "Never before had I been around so many people pushing hard on the frontiers of knowledge."

The "x" events were announced at that meeting.

As soon as he returned, a fired-up Orsak met Young at Gloria's on Greenville Avenue. They laid out plans for **TEDxSMU** on the back of a napkin – simple, quick and daring.

Variety is key

"We'll probably have 20 presentations from an entire spectrum of arts and sciences," Orsak says. "They will be short and to the point, fully engaging and provide people with a sense of excitement about ideas."



The cast includes experts in theology, space travel, mathematics, fine arts, engineering, photography, technology, media, film, music and business.

One star will be Dave Gallo of Woods Hole Oceanicographic Institute, whose talk at TED2007 about undersea exploration is one of the most popular presentations on the Web site.

You can't just buy a \$100 ticket to [TEDxSMU](#). Wannabe attendees have to fill out an extensive application to get to hear the speakers live. A review team will decide who gets the 480 available seats.

"One hundred bucks is kind of a throwaway cost," Orsak says. "But we do have an intellectual threshold. People have to be intellectually engaged in our community and the world to qualify to attend."

Another 500 or so will watch the simulcast. They don't have to go through the application process.

Looking for sponsors

To keep ticket prices low, Orsak needs to raise \$250,000 from sponsors. He's only raised a third of that with less than three months to go.

SMU has an added dimension: [TEDxKids@SMU](#), a conference created for 350 middle-school students. Student applicants must show curiosity and a thirst for answers for the serious predicaments facing our planet, Orsak says. Their cost of admission is three hours of community service.

This won't be watered-down Science Guy presentations for kiddies, Orsak says. "Our world's problems are already theirs. So, in the most compelling and exciting way possible, we will share the unvarnished truth – and unlimited possibilities – with this very precious generation."

Young believes there is a pent-up demand here. He recently went to a Starbucks wearing a TED T-shirt. The barista professed his avocation for viewing TED presentations online. A similar thing happened while he was at a hardware store in the same T-shirt, this time with a customer pushing a cart.

"That suggests to me that there's a good appetite for this," Young says.

ABOUT TEDxSMU

What: A locally produced version of TED, the international forum of technology, entertainment and design ideas held annually in California and England

When: Oct. 10, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Where: Southern Methodist University's Hughes Trigg Student Center, 3140 Dyer St.

Cost: \$100 but attendees must apply at www.tedxsmu.org/attend

What else: [TEDxKids@SMU](#), an adjunct program for middle-school students

When: Oct. 9, 1-4 p.m.

On the Web: www.TEDxSMU.org, www.twitter.com/TEDxSMU or www.TED.com

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