

Sparks talks diversity in new book

By Elizabeth Baker
Staff Writer

For Dana Rios, Nicholas Sparks' latest book, "See Me," has an extra special meaning. When the Salem College student found out about Maria — Sparks' first Hispanic protagonist — Rios, who is also Hispanic, was enthusiastic.

At "An Evening with Nicholas Sparks" on Tuesday, Rios got two signed books — one for herself and one for her brother, who lives in Texas.

Rios said it was actually her brother that got her into Sparks' work.

"Isn't that weird? A guy. A guy got me into Nicholas Sparks," she said.

Rios said her brother was very jealous she was getting to see Sparks.

"And I'm very happy that he is," she said, laughing. "At least I got him a book."

The event was hosted by Flyleaf Books and held at the Carolina Club. Jamie Fiocco, owner of Flyleaf Books, said she was excited to work with an author who has had success over different types of media, considering Sparks has not only written best-selling novels but has also written many screenplay adaptations of them.

"He's a North Carolina author. He's a New York Times best-selling author," she said. "We'd be crazy not to want to host him."

During the talk, which was held in the George Watts Hill Alumni Center, Sparks talked about a range of topics, from the writing of "See Me" to coaching track and field to owning his own movie production company.

Sparks said "See Me" is a story of love and danger, similar to the themes of his previous books "The Guardian" and "Safe Haven."

"Before you know it, you're caught up in something that you didn't know was happening at the time," he said.

While Sparks said he tries to vary as much as possible from book to book, he does intentionally keep some things the same.

"I write love stories, so 'she' meets a guy," he said.

Sparks said he writes dialogue in his novels the way he most often hears it in real life, lending an element of realism to his writing.

"What I try to create are stories and events that feel like they could happen to anyone," he said.

Sparks said he wants to depict a real picture of human life, and he sees sadness and



DTH/JULIA KLEIN

Nicholas Sparks (left) speaks during his book talk Tuesday night in the George Watts Hill Alumni Center alongside D.G. Martin.

death as a part of that.

"The purpose of a novel like mine is to move the reader through the range of human emotion, so they feel like they've experienced a full life by the time they close the cover," he said.

As far as his writing process,

Sparks said he's never really been bothered by the 'where' of writing, as he's finished novels in hotel rooms, in airplanes and on living room floors with kids crawling on him.

Sparks said he wanted to write a Hispanic main character because there are more

Hispanics in the South than there were 20 years ago.

"The world is becoming more global," he said. "Let's reflect that reality."

Rios said she planned on going home and reading "See Me" right then. Because of her own experience as a Hispanic

woman mixing into Southern culture, she said she was excited to see how Maria mixes into the culture of Wilmington, where the book is set.

"I'm pretty sure she's going to be my favorite character yet."

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Student-athlete admits' GPAs on the rise

By Maria Prokopowicz
Staff Writer

The Faculty Athletics Committee discussed student-athlete admissions in a joint meeting with the Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Admissions Tuesday afternoon.

Stephen Farmer, vice provost for enrollment and undergraduate admissions, said student-athletes are subject to the same admissions processes as other students and are also subject to additional scrutiny.

"The Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Admissions

is not in charge of that responsibility, neither is the Committee on Special Talent, neither is any other faculty or any other administrator," he said. "By University policy, the admissions office makes admissions decisions, and that's true for student-athletes, no less for any other student."

Farmer said there has been a significant decrease in the number of student-athletes admitted with predicted grade point averages of less than a 2.3 from 2006 to 2015. According to Farmer's data, 29 out of 157 students in 2006

had predicted GPAs below 2.3, compared to only nine out of 152 in 2015.

"Different people can have different opinions about this change, of course, but these are the facts," he said. "They're apples to apples comparisons from year to year."

He said these trends mean the framework for predicted GPA has higher standards than in the past.

"If you look at the trend lines of all these and you stack them up one to the other, they tell a story," Farmer said. "And I think what they tell is that

there is a story here of progress over the long haul, not over the last year, not over the last two years, but for a long time."

Faculty Athletics Committee chairperson Joy Renner said she is pleased with the trends in admission.

"I think we like the structure and process that's in place. We're holistically evaluating individuals for success at Carolina, so I think everybody feels strongly that that's a move forward," Renner said.

The committees then moved to closed session for about 30 minutes as they discussed data

regarding specific students.

"I also feel personally just very responsible for students," Farmer said. "I am reluctant to yield information about them that people might feel would compromise their safety at the University, compromise the experience they have here."

After resuming open session, Beverly Taylor, a member of the Undergraduate Admissions Advisory Committee, said she doesn't think GPA can be representative of students' educational experiences.

"It's kind of arrogant to say

somebody with a 2.2 GPA isn't getting an education," she said.

Andrew Perrin, a member of the Faculty Athletics Committee, disagreed, stressing the importance of examining GPA and finding patterns among students.

Farmer said he was happy with the current trends.

"I feel great about how things are going," Farmer said. "I feel great about the students we have here and I'm proud of them. I'm glad that they chose UNC."

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Teacher turnover on the rise in NC

By Hari Chittilla
Staff Writer

Teachers might not be here to stay, according to a recent report released by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

The 2014-15 Annual Report on Leaving the Profession said a total of 14,255 teachers left their positions in local school districts — creating an overall state turnover rate of 14.84 percent. This turnover rate, up from 14.12 percent in 2013-14, has increased in four of the past five years.

Suzanne Gulledge, a professor at the UNC School of Education, said she thinks this could be a disincentive for students to go into education. To keep teachers in the state, she said the School of Education will offer a five-year Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in teaching program next fall with in-classroom opportunities.

"It'll have a residency component where one spends a substantial time in public schools in school work," Gulledge said.

Keith Poston, executive director of the N.C. Public School Forum, said while salary and working conditions can drive teacher turnover, there are other factors.

"Teachers often feel like they don't have a voice in their career, in the decisions made at the state level and the district level in terms of instruction and policies," Poston said.

But Lindalyn Kakadelis, director of education outreach for the right-leaning John Locke Foundation, said numbers don't tell the whole story — some teachers simply took on administrative roles or retired.

Poston said he thinks many are leaving and going to bordering states with higher teacher salaries, like South Carolina, Georgia and Virginia. According to the report, 1,028 teachers left their positions to teach in another state.

He said the state also faces a problem recruiting students for teacher education programs.

"We're almost 30 percent down over the past five years," Poston said.

Kakadelis said there has been a net gain of teachers coming from other states.

"I don't think we're seeing a flood of teachers leaving North Carolina," she said.

Jeff Nash, a spokesperson for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, said state officials have known for years its universities are not turning out enough teachers — leaving

it dependent on out-of-state candidates.

"Unfortunately, legislative action — and legislative attitudes toward public schools — in recent years has made North Carolina the object of many jokes nationwide," he said.

Though CHCCS did not have the highest turnover rate, Nash said he is still concerned.

"Our expectation is an excellent teacher in every classroom, but we are very concerned about the coming years and whether we will be able to meet that expectation," he said.

Kakadelis said because of excessive state regulation, if she had a doctorate in chemistry, she would not be permitted to teach in a high school classroom without receiving additional accreditation.

"We don't have a teacher shortage, we have an HR problem," Kakadelis said.

Poston said we must instead empower teachers to enter the field and pay them accordingly.


"We can't rely on missionaries and folks that'll teach no matter what," he said. "We're not investing adequately in the schools, in the resources for the schools and in the teachers themselves."

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