

Small Market Meetings

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Groups can meet on the shaded, serene campus at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

Courtesy Chapel Hill/Orange Co. VB

Southern School Spirit

By Rachel Carter

College campuses inherently have a youthful vibe and a fresh vitality. Meeting planners love all that college towns have to offer, and meeting attendees love to tap into that energy.

These Southern college towns always offer activities and entertainment, and campuses have resources that can support planners with a plethora of meeting facilities, catering, team building and group tours.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

The North Carolina legislature chartered its first university in 1789, and construction on the campus in Chapel Hill began in 1793. The University of North Carolina (UNC) is the first public university in the nation to hold classes and graduate students, “so it’s steeped in a lot of pride and history and tradition,” said Marlene Barbera, director of sales for the Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau.

Though Chapel Hill is a small, friendly Southern town, UNC’s prestige draws students from around the world, giving it an international flair. The university always has something going on – concerts, plays, sporting events – and Barbera can also leverage UNC professors and faculty to lead workshops and speak at conferences.

“There are a lot of resources for people who want to tap into what the university has to offer,” she said.

On campus, the Friday Conference Center is the

most-used meeting venue, with 25,000 square feet of event space in 25 meetings rooms as well as a 400-seat auditorium and a sunlight-filled central atrium.

At the Carolina Club in the George Watts Hill Alumni Center, a 7,200-square-foot ballroom can be split into three spaces that each open onto the adjoining terrace.

The school’s historic Morehead Planetarium and Science Center houses the State Dining Room, which can seat up to 150 for meals, although organizers must donate in addition to paying the rental fee to use the venue. Groups can also rent two different levels in the Blue Zone at Kenan Memorial Stadium, home of the Tar Heels.

The visitors bureau can also help arrange guided tours of campus, private tours of the Ackland Art Museum and behind-the-scenes tours of the Dean Smith Center, where the men’s basketball team, which last year won the NCAA National Championship, plays.

www.visitchapelhill.org

Gainesville, Florida

As home to the University of Florida, “there’s always something going on” in Gainesville, said Kelly Aleman, tourism sales manager for Visit Gainesville/Alachua