

Engaging Outside Speakers Tip Sheet

HKS carries tremendous convening power and international networks, and we encourage faculty to tap those networks, creating opportunities for students to engage practitioners and experts within courses.

Why Bring in Outside Speakers?

- Practitioners provide a strong sense of how to apply the ideas we discuss in the classroom in real life.
 - They make visible the “practitioner perspective” – how experts think about a particular issue
 - They provide students a vision of possible career paths – who they might become, who they might work for
- Outside speakers can internationalize and diversify course offerings, showing perspectives on course issues that go beyond the United States.
- Interaction with outside speakers can offer models of ways to disagree gracefully.

Whom to Invite, and How Many?

- Know guest speaker(s) well, or make sure to have seen them give a presentation that is high-quality and in tune with course aims – be confident they’ll connect well with students and reinforce core themes.
- Don’t just bring in speakers that students will “like” – also ones whose ways of thinking will be crucial to understand, given the learning goals of the course.
- Keep the number limited (no more than 2-4 in a semester), in order to keep class continuity

How to Prepare Speakers and Students?

- Pre-class briefing / discussion with the speaker (in-person and/or via e-mail), including:
 - Course objectives and context – share syllabus
 - Student profile / demographics
 - The role the speaker will play in the session; where their session fits in the overall course
 - How much time to take (be very clear on this – speakers often have too much material to share)
 - Which aspects of their work to emphasize
 - Schedule / logistics (e.g., will the speaker have time with students outside class? some guests are eager to engage with students, others want to limit their time here to just class)
- Collect student questions in advance; vet and share with speaker
- Occasionally, a speaker is unable to come at the last minute – hosting faculty should prepare to teach class as a backup

Ways to Incorporate Speakers into Class Session / Roles They Can Play

- “Yield the Floor” – guest speaks for 30-40 minutes, then engages in Q&A from students (+ perhaps instructor, to underscore key course themes)
- Q & A Exchange between the guest and the course instructor; the advantage here is that it’s more structured, and able to cover certain points / issues
- Commentator (particularly common if the guest is protagonist of a case the class is focusing on), visitor listens to class discussion, then offers brief feedback and perspectives

In-person vs. via video conferencing?

- Videoconferencing typically is a fraction of the cost (in both funds and carbon footprint) of bringing speakers here
- Be careful in how you allocate limited outside speaker slots; it's best to use videoconferencing when it's a VIP who'd be hard to bring in otherwise, or if it will be a brief (10-15 minute) exchange
- The quality of the technology (including screen size) matters; do a dry run to make sure all technical aspects will work well

How to Thank Them / Offer Incentives for the Visit?

1. Guests are usually eager to accept the invitation; it can be seen as an honor / welcome addition to their resume to be asked to speak at Harvard
2. Offer to arrange meetings with other faculty colleagues, to enable them to build their network, try out some new ideas.
3. Inquire whether the speaker could benefit from a student project or summer intern and refer them to the appropriate people (PAE contact and OCA contact).
4. Use funds from your faculty support account or team up with an HKS research center to offer to cover the speakers travel or hotel expenses, host the speaker to dinner, or offer a modest gift (e.g. HKS clock, etc.)

How to Follow Up?

- Reserve time in the class following the speaker, to discuss and debrief the visit with students
- If students ask for speakers' e-mails, offer to forward student e-mails to the speakers, instead.

These ideas were based on remarks by HKS faculty Alan Altshuler and Meghan O'Sullivan at an HKS Teaching Seminar "Managing Outside Speakers: Engaging Opportunities and Avoiding Pitfalls."