

**Pedagogical Practices—Guest Speakers**  
**Stephanie Edel-Malizia**  
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Inviting guest speakers to interact with students in your course engages students in their learning through broadening the relevance of the topic. By providing access to experts, peers, and members of the professional community, students gain the opportunity to meet another person who is passionate about the topic being learned, and who can potentially guide, mentor, tutor, mediate, broker, share, inform, and involve students in deeper learning in more productive and meaningful ways.

## Use of Guest Speakers

The following are some of the ways this teaching approach is used to engage students:

**Collaborative projects:** Learning through hands-on projects may be most powerful when it involves flexible, learning-centered investigations that bring students together with practicing professionals and community members.

**Just in time resource experts:** For example, ask a research librarian to discuss effective search strategies before assigning a research project.

**Academic experts:** Consider inviting senior or tenured faculty. This approach may solidify students' interests in a specific field of study/major or continued graduate studies.

**Practitioners:** Information shared by experts in the field can lend further credibility to the content covered in the course.

## Technology Use

The following list of technologies that can be used to host a guest speaker:

[Skype](#): Provides video, audio, and chat for free.

[Google Hangout](#): Provides access to video, audio, chat, and screen sharing with groups of people for free.

[Zoom](#): Provides access to videoconferencing and screen sharing for free.

[Meeting@PennState](#): Penn State provides videoconferencing services using Adobe Connect, an enterprise web conferencing solution for online meetings, e-learning, and webinars.

## Assessment

Content covered by guest speakers can be assessed by using the same methods as any other content that students learn throughout the course. The key is to make sure students understand that they are just as responsible for mastering content from guest lecturers as they are for mastering the content you provide. One possible method would be to have a discussion based on the information shared by the guest speaker.

## Impact

According to research by Sniezek (2005), using guest speakers in instruction can impact learning through:

- Building linkages between academia and the practitioner
- Improving community-school relations
- Providing professional role models for students
- Greatly enhancing student learning
- Raising cultural sensitivity
- Enhancing practical and technical knowledge in a particular field
- Challenging students' stereotypes

## Things to Consider

For successful implementation of guest speakers, you should consider the following strategies:

- Spend time finding the right guest.
  - This can often be determined through conversations with colleagues and contacts in professional networks. Simply ask whether people are familiar with the speaker and whether they think the person would be a suitable guest expert.
  - Be sure the person has good speaking skills. Make an appointment to meet with the guest speaker either virtually or in person prior to confirming the speaking request.

- Make sure the speaker will show up to the classroom or connect to the course on time.
  - If you are having a guest in your classroom, be sure to have him or her meet you on location prior to the event, if at all possible. If a practice meeting is not possible, be sure to have someone meet the guest speaker at a central location and escort the person to the classroom on the day of the event.
  - If the speaker is connecting via technology either in your classroom or in an online course, set a time for a practice connection.
  - Send multiple confirmations/reminders up to and including the day before the event.
- Be sure the guest speaker is prepared to cover the appropriate and correct information as related to the course topics.
  - Provide the person with a copy of your syllabus and required reading list.
  - Explain specific information you would like the person to cover.
  - Ask the speaker for an outline of his/her speaking notes in advance of the event.
  - Give guidelines on how formal or informal as well as how interactive you would like the discussion to be.
- Tell the speaker the expected time limits.
- Consider conducting an interview with the guest speaker rather than giving him or her open discussion with students. This provides more control in keeping the guest on topic.
- Be sure to formally thank the guest speaker for his/her contribution to the course.

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