

# Planning Guide for Visiting Speakers 2018-19

## *What is the challenge?*

Why and how do we host speakers on this campus? The default model for academic talks is a lengthy, one-way delivery of information, followed by a very few questions. In this digital era, this model is no different from watching a TED talk or YouTube video. With a few notable exceptions, we are spending a lot of money on events with few attendees and little engagement with and among audience members.

There is another way. The invitation to our campus could be understood as an invitation *into our community*. Speakers do set the initial agenda, and they should have a reasonable amount of time to present to the audience. Yet these events offer the opportunity to create ongoing campus conversations and build relationships that last beyond the particular event.

## *A different type of event*

The goal of this new format is to create a better conversation and stronger relationships. Productive dialogue about complex ideas and difficult topics requires time and trust. A more intentional format for speakers can create spaces in which we listen together, understand a wide variety of arguments, reflect on our own views and experiences, and build a conversation that will continue beyond the single event.

Small changes can yield big results. Below, we offer some ideas of questions and techniques to build audience engagement. This new model may feel strange at first, but these techniques are similar to what many professors do to create a great class.

The Engaged Listening project has assembled an advisory group that can help design and even facilitate these events. Please email [ListeningMidd@gmail.com](mailto:ListeningMidd@gmail.com) for consultation and advice.

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## Event Structure - General

The guidelines below are not rigid rules but suggested guidelines for facilitating active listening, deep audience engagement, and dialogue. Many of these techniques are used regularly in our classrooms. They require a few minutes of advance planning. If the planning feels difficult, please be in touch!

In general, we recommend that speakers formally present for less than half the allotted time. Below are some examples of formats for events of different lengths.

<b>EVENT LENGTH</b>	<b>Welcome, small group introductions</b>	<b>Introduce speaker and rules</b>	<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Small group discussion</b>	<b>Q&amp;A</b>
<b>60 minutes</b>		5	25	15	15
<b>75 minutes</b>	5	5	30	15	20
<b>90 minutes</b>	15	5	30	20	20

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## Before the Event Begins

- *With the speaker:* Ask if the speaker would consider a shorter presentation to allow greater audience engagement. Seek input from the speaker on format and on specific discussion questions.
- *Facilitation:* if you would like help facilitating the event, please email [ListeningMidd@gmail.com](mailto:ListeningMidd@gmail.com)
- *Engage before the event:* After gathering RSVPs, invite attendees to begin the conversation. “Why are you interested in this topic/speaker?” “What information do you think you need to understand this topic?” This can be done privately via email or Slack, or publicly on Facebook or Twitter (@ListeningMidd).
- *Set up:* Welcome attendees. Provide name tags, and cluster seats in small groups if possible. Encourage folks to sit with people that they do not know, or to drop questions and comments for the speaker in a fishbowl. If you have set up a Twitter conversation, display it on a screen.

## Welcome and Introductions

- *Welcome:* Introduce yourself as the facilitator. Invite attendees to begin the conversation by introducing themselves to a couple of neighbors and answer one of the following questions:
  - “What is at stake for you personally in this topic?”
  - “What content or ideas are you listening for?”
- *Introduction:* Reconvene the large group, perhaps following this script:
  - “Thank you all for entering into this conversation and coming to today’s event. Today we are going to use a slightly different set of guidelines as part of a broader campus project called “Engaged Listening.” The project seeks to build spaces in which we listen together in order to understand a wide variety of positions, reflect on our own views, and build a conversation that lasts well past this event. We ask that you turn off your phones, stay in the room, and commit to engaging in this topic and with one another. Our format is as follows: ... Now I’d like to introduce today’s guest...”

## Questions for Small Groups

Questions for small group discussion should be open-ended and invite conversation. Without specific direction, small group discussions will seek consensus or peter out. Offer precise instructions and follow up individually with groups that appear to be stalling. Some possible questions (choose one or two):

### *Opening Questions*

- What is the one-sentence take away for you?
- What did you hear or see that surprised you?
- What did you hear that feels familiar? What feels very distant from your own experience?
- What changed for you as a result of what you just heard?

### *Follow-up Questions*

- What important questions remain unanswered?
- Is there one question that we all want to ask the speaker?
- *For each person in a group:* name one thing they heard that they agree with, one thing they heard that they disagree with, one thing that they would like more information about.
- *if things get heated:* can you each share a story from your own experience that informs your position?
- *if competing positions emerge:* where do each of you feel pulled in different directions on this issue?