

## Hosting Speakers

Whether you're hosting a small conference or arranging a national forum for debate, you will be working with speakers.

On campus, speakers typically represent one of two groups: visiting faculty, government officials, or other experts who are willing to share their knowledge for little or no compensation; or big-name authors, celebrities, or professional speakers who command hefty fees. Here are some tips for caring for both types.

### **Book early**

Contact popular speakers, especially celebrities, at least a year in advance; six months is a minimum.

### **Be specific**

Tell the speaker why you want her and what you would like her to address. Mention the purpose of the event, the nature and size of the audience, how long the talk should be, who else and what else will be on the program, whether a meal is involved, and whether you want the speaker to attend social events, mingle with students on campus, or meet with the press. Most experienced speakers have a repertoire of presentations that they tailor to audiences and will use your background information to determine if their material matches your needs. Most won't be willing to prepare a presentation or speech from scratch.

### **Don't be shy**

Discuss fees, perks, and expense reimbursements up front. If you are booking a celebrity or professional speaker, this will be done with the speaker's agent or a speakers bureau.

### **Get it in writing**

As soon as a verbal deal is reached, follow up in writing. A speaker (or other talent) is never confirmed until you have a signed contract. Have all contracts reviewed by your school attorney before signing. All speakers, even unpaid volunteers, should sign a written agreement.

### **Work ahead of deadlines**

Don't wait until the last minute to request biographical information, photos, and written descriptions of workshops or speeches.

## **Never title a presentation**

Don't name a speech, describe its content, or publish biographical information without the approval of the speaker or her representative.

## **Be sure**

It is wise to have the speaker preview promotional pieces before they are released. Set a deadline for reply. This is particularly important for workshop and conference speakers whose presentations are to be capsulized in promotional materials.

## **Make travel arrangements early**

Be certain the speaker knows whether you will make the arrangements, or if he or she should. Be clear about who will initially pay for travel. Will the speaker pay first and file for reimbursement, or will you make and pay for arrangements? Before booking, find out speakers' airline preferences. Avoid scheduling a speaker's arrival on the day of the speech, the likelihood of off-schedule flights due to weather or other problems is too high.

## **Book and confirm quality accommodations**

Find out your guest's preferences as to bed size, use of fitness facilities, and dietary restrictions, and book accordingly. Put a hospitality gift in the room such as a fruit and bottled water basket, fresh bread and cheese tray, candies, or flowers. Speakers appreciate information about the university and, in the case of a conference or meeting, a copy of the agenda, roster of participants, and locations of meeting rooms. Provide the cell phone number of a contact person in case the speaker has questions or problems. If the speaker will stay in university accommodations, provide specific directions about the location and check-in. Alert university personnel to expect your special guests. Avoid accommodating speakers in private homes.

## **Assign an escort**

Strange cities and unfamiliar campuses can be confusing. The last thing a speaker needs is to get lost or to struggle to find parking or the correct campus building. Speakers should be escorted door-to-door by a student or staff member who has access to VIP parking areas. If the speaker is flying in, pick her up at the airport, transport her throughout the visit, and plan to drive her back to the airport. If the speaker is traveling by car, e-mail directions with full addresses. Always include the hotel's full name, street address, and phone number as well as the escort's cell phone number. The day of the presentation, provide an escort to take the speaker to the meeting room.

## **Allow some quiet time**

Don't exhaust your speaker by overscheduling. Most speakers need rest to be at their best, and most want time alone for about an hour before the talk to concentrate, review notes, and freshen up. Don't surprise your speaker by adding last-minute functions to the agenda.

## **Arrange a proper introduction**

The person introducing the speaker should have a script and be confident in the proper pronunciation of the speaker's name. Be certain by calling the speaker's office in advance for guidance. It is a good idea to rehearse the introduction.

## **Watch the time**

Keep the program on schedule, and don't rearrange the order of speakers unless it is an emergency.

## **Hire a pro to run AV equipment**

Hire professional AV staff to adjust microphones, troubleshoot computer and Internet problems, and operate slide shows and videos.

## **Water them**

Provide each speaker with fresh, room temperature, water at the podium. Some speakers have very specific requests such as hot herbal tea with honey that are key to their success rituals. Inquire in advance.

## **Check the podium**

Be sure the podium has a paper rest to secure notes and a working light to enable the speaker to read in a dimly lit hall or during AV presentation. If the speaker needs a laptop, be certain the podium has room to accommodate it on a flat surface so that the computer doesn't slide off.

## **Check it again**

Make sure that all cords are secured to the floor, that legs of easels are snapped firmly in place, and that audience views are not obstructed by equipment. Keep awards to be presented, large floral arrangements, and other distractions away from the podium.

## **Get good photos**

Hang your university banner behind the podium or attach your logo to it so your branding appears in photos and videos. Hire a professional photographer and provide her a list of shots you want made.

## **Let there be light**

Arrange lighting so that the speaker can be seen when slides or videos are being shown. Otherwise, your star becomes a faceless voice in the darkness.

## **Tell the speaker how to dress**

Will the audience members be in black-tie, business attire, or just in from the golf course?

## **Will there be questions?**

Decide beforehand whether the speaker will answer questions and for what period of time. Have wireless hand-held mics or stand mics positioned so that audience members' questions can be heard. Use a moderator to promptly cut off questions at the time limit.

## **Have the check ready**

If you are working with an agent, payment terms will be specified in the contract. Typically, you will pay the agent and he or she will then pay the speaker. If your speaker is unpaid, immediately send a letter of thanks. A small, quality gift that is a memento of your school is also a nice gesture.

## **Reimburse promptly**

E-mail travel reimbursement forms to the speaker's office immediately and file the claim for payment promptly.

## **Tell 'em how they did**

If participants evaluated the speaker, provide him or her a sampling of the results, both positive and negative. Speakers especially appreciate comments and suggestions and use them to perfect future presentations.