



How to Host a Speaker in 10 Easy Steps

Step 1: Identify the audience. Choose a speaker who is a good fit for the school

At each school you will encounter a different crowd; some schools are conservative and others are liberal. Every environment will carry with it a different challenge when it comes to hosting a speaker. Often students at conservative schools lapse into complacency and apathy; choosing a speaker at a school like this one will be different from a speaker for a liberal school, where the students will likely be more closed or aggressive towards the message. Keep this in mind when considering the options available.

At a liberal school, a speaker with a non-biased argument might promote the message of chastity and marriage better. At a conservative or religiously –affiliated school, perhaps a softer, religious approach to sexual ethics might be perfect. Each speaker takes a different approach and sets a unique tone to the dialogue about marriage, family, and sexuality. Consider how their message will be received when researching which speakers would be a good fit for the school. Speakers might be available through a personal friend, a well-known and respected faculty member, an organization in your community, etc. The Love and Fidelity Network provides an expansive list of recommended speakers, each with something unique and invaluable to add to the dialogue promoting marriage, the family, and sexual ethics. (See our list of recommended speakers)

Step 2: Decide on a theme or topic

As you consider which speaker is right for you, consider the topic that you find most pertinent. Any issue that is timely or time-sensitive will be effective, for example. In the field of sexual ethics, marriage, and the family, there are many different topics from which to choose. Among these would be economics and the family, family and its role in society, the effects of the hook-up culture on youth and young adults, or balancing family and career, to name a few. Choose a topic that is in conjunction with the mission of your school's sponsor group, or would be most helpful to the students, given the environment at the university.

Step 3: Fundraise

In your planning, keep in mind your budget or the budget of your student group. Your event will cost some money. Often, speakers require an honorarium and/ or travel accommodations. These costs differ depending on the fame of the speaker, how far they have to travel to attend your event, etc. Your school may charge a fee to rent the room, and you will want to set aside some funds for food and drinks for the event. If the school administration does not provide enough funding to support the event, it may be necessary to fundraise. This can be done quite easily, if you follow a few simple guidelines. (See our How-To "How to Fundraise and Gain Support From Your Community")

Step 4: Set a Date and Time

Choose a date and time that will maximize the amount of students who can attend the event. Typically, weekends are not a good time to host speakers. Consider your school's calendar and check for holidays, events, or tests that will interfere and draw attention away from your event. Generally, lectures are best attended when they are scheduled during one of the three middle



days of the week; Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays, and at a time after dinner: 7:30, for example. This also works best for the speaker, who may be traveling in from out of town and will want to give the lecture, provide time for questions and answer sessions, and either catch a late flight or return to the hotel at a suitable hour. Set enough time for the event to include the lecture, a question and answer period, and some gathering and chatting afterwards for photographs, further questions, and snacking. Typically 2 hours is plenty of time.

Step 5: Rent a Room

Often renting a room at the university will be free if you are a member of a school group. If you are an individual hosting the speaker, see if you can obtain sponsorship from a student group or organization. This will likely save you money and make your event appear much more credible. School administration is also more likely to take you and your event seriously if it is proposed through the channels of a student organization.

What room to choose? This step is actually quite important, because the location of the event in many ways sets the tone for the entire event and the message. When choosing a room, consider the amount of students who are likely to attend the event. If the speaker is well-known, speaking on a controversial topic, and you attend a large university, there may be upwards of 200 people attending the event. In all probability, however, the event will be smaller. This is okay. Choose a room that will make your event appear popular and successful – having standing-room only is a good thing, and will add a sense of vitality to the issue, and the student sponsor group. Set up an amount of chairs that is slightly less than the predicted number of students expected. Better to err on the side of too small, rather than too large. It is great to have all of the chairs filled, and if you have to pull in more chairs, this will give the impression that the event is important (which it is), necessary, and popular.

Be sure that any microphone and/ or projectors are in working condition and available for the speaker to use. Have them prepared at the time of the event.

Step 6: Advertise Effectively

Efficient advertising is perhaps the most crucial element to the success of your event. Without it, your speaker will not be seen, your message will not be heard, and your efforts will be less effective. Try to advertise in a positive and competent manner, never on the defensive or in a negative tone. Your event should be presented as appealing and intriguing. It is helpful to assign one student leader or a committee to be in charge of the advertising, to ensure that there is enough time and effort being given to this important step. (See our How-To “How to Advertise Effectively” Brochure)

Step 7: Speaker Logistics

If your speaker is traveling from out of town, arrangements should be made to ensure that they are comfortable during the entire event. They may be able to arrange their own flights, but you should have transportation to and from the airport and hotel prepared. You will probably also make the hotel reservations for them. Upon their arrival, escort them around to get them oriented to the campus and see that they arrive at their hotel safely. During the event, have water on hand for them. Make sure that his/her every need is looked after so that s/he is as comfortable as possible.



Step 8: Buy food/ hors d' oeuvres

Students love free food! Fancy foods are unnecessary; one great method is to choose easy and light foods that everyone enjoys. Chips, dip, brownies, fruit plates, veggie plates, bagels, or crackers and cheese are all great lecture foods. Soda, juice, or water is a great beverage; no alcohol. If you are planning a small intimate group setting such as “Dinner with a Speaker,” try to choose a meal that will be easy to prepare and go a long way, such as pizza, spaghetti, chicken nuggets, or a big chicken salad. These options are inexpensive, filling, and fun.

Step 9: During the Event

Someone should be selected prior to the event to act as a sort of moderator. This person will give an introduction and opening remarks about the speaker before the lecture begins. Ask the speaker beforehand if there is anything in particular he/she would like to have mentioned. This person will also moderate the Q&A session. (One method of organizing Q&A sessions is to encourage students to write down their questions during the lecture and submit them anonymously afterwards. This enables a moderator to screen the question before submitting it to the speaker.)

After the speaker concludes his lecture, keep the momentum of the event going. Jump up and thank the speaker for his/ her brilliant insights and open the floor for questions and comments. If there is a particularly argumentative student or a question that is taking up too much time, steer the conversation to another question gracefully. Prepare some sample questions of your own beforehand to facilitate this. (Be prepared to deal with purposefully uncomfortable questions with tactful questions of your own to change the topic.) Conclude the Q&A session by thanking the speaker again and thanking all who attended the event. You may also use this juncture to advertize your student group, announce upcoming events, encourage students to continue discussing the issues, etc. Let the students know that the event has ended, but they are free to remain if they would like. Steer them towards the free food, perhaps. After the event, consider chatting with the students personally to get their reactions and possibly collect some testimonies from them to use in future news articles (only with their permission, of course!).

Step 10: Photographer / PR person / Follow-up

Once the dialogue has been initiated by your speaker on campus, capitalize on the momentum that has begun. Have a person assigned to write a follow-up article covering the event in the school newspaper (See our brochure “How to Communicate Effectively in Writing”). Have a student who attended the event write an op-ed of their own. Be prepared with cohesive and articulate arguments responding to any negative backlash you may receive from the event (See our brochure “How to Turn Criticism into an Asset). Always present the event in a positive and determined manner; do not become reactionary or defensive. (Negative attention can actually be positive attention, because it means that there has been a dialogue created and heightened awareness about the issues. If you handle negative attention appropriately, you may have the opportunity to reveal the true nature of your event and your student group despite criticism.) Remain confident, cheerful, and unaffected. Others will take notice. Persevere.