

PRACTITIONER SPEAKERS

SNAPSHOT

Students learn about Boston, urban life, and social change from guest lectures by local practitioners in the policy, business, and non-profit sectors.

LESSON PLAN

Goals:



- Provide students insights into how individuals shape their urban environment by engaging them in conversations with **key actors** in Boston government policy, community organizing, entrepreneurship, non-profit sector work, etc.
- Teach students about Boston history and contemporary challenges.
- Equip students to be invested members of urban communities by teaching them skills for understanding their urban environment and being civically involved.

Class:

United States in the World 24:
Reinventing Boston: The Changing
American City

Background:

This course introduces students to Boston and the study of urban life through readings, discussions, guest lectures from practitioners, and visits to four neighborhoods in Boston. Students learn to utilize quantitative and geographical information to understand the city, and to conduct their own research through careful observation and interviews. Throughout the course, the instructors invite local practitioners to share insights

SPOTLIGHT

This activity can be used by all instructors. Though it is written for a class focusing on the Boston area, instructors from elsewhere can bring in speakers from their own localities, or from further afield. It can also be used by instructors in other disciplines. Students in various fields can benefit from the expertise of medical practitioners, artists, architects, lawyers, librarians, etc.

The activity also helps students develop subject-specific intuitions. Exposing them to a range of perspectives on ongoing issues concerning Boston's urban environment and history helps students appreciate how many different forces are simultaneously at work in shaping the trajectory of the city and how enduring an influence historical developments may have on the future of a city.

THINGS WE LIKE

This activity introduces students to a range of community actors, exposing them both to a range of issues and to a range of perspectives on the same issues. Aim for breadth in both the professional and the demographic (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) backgrounds of speakers to provide the most comprehensive range of perspectives possible and promote an inclusive classroom environment.

into Boston's history and future. Examples of speakers include:



- **Directors of local nonprofits and community organizations**
- ***Boston Globe* journalists**
- **Prominent entrepreneurs involved in creating entrepreneurship initiatives in Boston**
- **Advisors to the Mayor**
- **Executives of the Boston 2024 Olympics committee**

Procedure:



- One of the instructors typically sets up a phone call a week before the class with the speaker, and **lunch right before class**. This helps orient the speaker to the logistics of their visit, the topics being discussed in the course during that part of the semester, and students' background knowledge concerning the topics.
- Students are presented with readings or videos that relate to the topic discussed by the speaker, as well as a few paragraphs on the course website, written by course instructors, introducing the speaker and topic.
- Students are expected to submit 1 question per quarter about the readings. These are due at 5 PM on the day before the class the students are interested in. This allows the instructors to integrate them into their lecture and section discussions, as well as to pass them on to guest speakers. In this way, speakers can get a sense of what students are thinking about and interested in.
- **Speakers may use a variety of teaching practices during their time with the class, but should leave time for questions.**



Comments:

While many courses utilize guest lecturers on particular academic subjects, USW-24 is unique in its focus on exposing students to practitioners currently involved in pressing Boston issues, from journalists to entrepreneurs to members of the mayor's staff. Thus, it is very helpful for the instructors involved in the course to have

THINGS WE LIKE

You can ask students to recommend relevant practitioners. Students may know community leaders whom they consider role models and who can also inspire other students in the class, and inviting them would give these leaders a chance to shine and be recognized. If you do invite speakers based on students recommendations, make sure to arrange a comprehensive preliminary phone call to ensure they are an appropriate fit for the class.

WAYS TO ADAPT

Build enthusiasm for speaker visits by using them as a networking opportunity for students. Invite students to lunch with the speakers. If possible, create a sign-up list at the beginning of the term with speakers and brief bios for each one. Based on their interests, students can rank their preferences for speaker lunches. They can use these opportunities to ask more detailed questions and get to know speakers better. Alternatively, you can assign students to lunches to avoid favoritism and push students to meet speakers they otherwise would not have.

WAYS TO ADAPT

For an advanced class, have interested students volunteer to introduce the speaker and moderate the Q&A. Graduate students may find this helpful practice for serving as conference or lecture moderators in their academic careers. If you adopt this option, ensure that students have researched the speaker by setting up a pre-class debrief to discuss their intros. Highlights

ties to many individuals in the community whom they can invite.

One challenge of utilizing guest speakers is that this practice can make it difficult to maintain a coherent arc to the course and to ensure that topics aren't repeated. Thus, preparing speakers and orienting them to the subjects that have been discussed in the class is essential.

Materials:



- **Attached is a sample page from the course website of the reading and viewing assignments for a class including a guest speaker.**



- **Students read academic scholarship on the topic, read articles, and view multimedia** related to the particular Boston organizations and issues being discussed.

Submitted by David Luberoff, Lecturer in Sociology

THINGS WE LIKE

This activity has students grapple with and synthesize a range of primary sources. This teaches students to weigh the pros and cons of different research sources.

WAYS TO ADAPT

One way to have students engage more closely with the materials is by having students take turns curating and/or presenting these readings or videos. Student-picked materials can supplement those you choose.



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