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## Using Recent Graduates as Five-minute Guest Speakers to Provide Professional Socialization and Topical Context for Students

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### Abstract:

Information systems (IS) professors sometimes employ guest speakers in the classroom. Teaching online with synchronous video affords new ways to use guest speakers. We relate the benefits of using recent alumni at the beginning of synchronous online class sessions for short question-and-answer discussions on class topics. These sessions provide a useful context for professors to use during lectures and for students to socialize into IS professions. We found it easier to invite professionals and recent alumni back into our classroom to “meet with” our students and provide context for lectures in a time when many professionals work from home.

**Keywords:** Professional Identity, Professional Socialization, Peer Learning, Synchronous Online Teaching.

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## 1 Introduction

The fact that educators now commonly teach synchronously online due to the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) meant that we had opportunity to rethink how we use guest speakers in our classrooms. Ironically, during a global pandemic, it may actually be easier to incorporate guest speakers into the classroom because they can more easily join an online classroom and the fact that many professionals work from home during a pandemic. While educators can use guest speakers in many ways, I extol the use of recent graduates to provide context for lectures and professional socialization and identity for students. Many recent graduates currently work from home and have the flexibility to join a virtual class. These guest speakers have a similar age and experience to students and can provide useful context for lecture topics, socialization into IS professions, career advice, and they can serve as exemplars and mentors for students.

For professors, this practice represents a useful way to provide context for a lecture and an attention-grabbing activity that puts students in a ready state for learning. It also brings more relevance as students better understand how people use the lecture topic in the workplace.

## 2 Description of Practice

Effectively using guest speakers requires advance coordination. Conceptual classes such as introduction to information systems or systems analysis and design afford many opportunities to incorporate guest speakers, but one can use the technique in any class. I use the following process in developing this practice:

- 1) **Weeks in advance:** through alumni networks such as email lists, Facebook, or LinkedIn groups, I invite recent graduates to join the first five to ten minutes of a class that meets synchronously online. I provide an example message that I posted to a LinkedIn group for graduates in Figure 1.
- 2) **One week in advance:** I coordinate topics with guest speakers in advance to insure optimal pairing of skills and experience with the day's topic. I also share questions that I will ask them on the day in advance.
- 3) **During class:** I engage with recent alumni engage in dialogue that covers the previously discussed questions and their experience with the lecture topic (5-10 minutes maximum). After this, I allow students to ask questions before I thank the guest and proceed with the class.



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Unique times bring unique opportunities!

I'd love to invite any of you to jump into my zoom class for 5 minutes on Tuesday at 12:25pm on Apr 7th, 14th, or 28th. Or meet me on zoom for a 5 minute chat that I'll record and share with my students. Email me: [olsent@gonzaga.edu](mailto:olsent@gonzaga.edu)

A few Q's I'd love to have you answer: Can you introduce yourself, and your career path? What do you like about your current position? How has the MIS concentration helped you? Any advice for students?

I'd love to have any of you join - even if you are not currently in an "MIS" job!

You remember how it was when you were a student! Your perspective will be super helpful to students who are facing an uncertain environment. Thanks!

👍 1 · 3 Comments

**Figure 1. Screenshot of LinkedIn Post to Alumni Group Soliciting Speakers**

### 3 Discussion

This short practice seems to bring several benefits for students, instructors, and the recent alumni. It allows students to socialize with professionals who were recently (1-5 years) in the same position and enables the students to build valuable connections with the professionals. Outside recruiting events, students may have few opportunities to connect with recent alumni to inquire about how things are in the workplace. Finally, it helps students learn how professionals use content discussed in the classroom in the workplace.

Through guest speakers, club meetings, job fairs, recruiting events, students become socialized into IS careers and what it means to “be an IS major”. Researchers have linked professional socialization to increased job satisfaction, decreased “entry shock”, decreased job turnover, and increased ethical awareness and behavior (O’Brien, 2018). Anticipatory socialization refers to times students can “try on” or “rehearse” for career roles (Elias, 2006). The need for socialization opportunities for our students has never been greater, and, as most professionals now work from home, they have never been so widely available to join our classrooms.

Many students do not take advantage of or do not have many professional socialization opportunities. Using recent graduates as guest speakers represents a great way to encourage our students to socialize into the IS profession. Researchers have linked these forms of social support to increasing enrollments and better professional outcomes (Akbulut-Bailey, 2012; Ramiller, 2003).

Peer learning refers to an educational practice where students interact with other students to obtain educational goals (O’Donnell & King, 2014). Researchers have written much about peer learning’s effectiveness and use in IS classrooms (Denton & Spangler, 2001; Marquardson & Schuetzler, 2019; Zhang, Zhang, Stafford, & Zhang, 2013). This practice extends peer learning to peers who are a few years senior and allows them to learn from their practical experience on the job.

Instructors benefit from context that alumni’s professional experience provides and may be able to incorporate their experiences into their lecture as illustrative examples. Having alumni serve as guest speakers constitutes one way some programs have increased enrollment (Granger, Dick, Jacobson, & Van Slyke, 2007; Whelan & Firth, 2012). It also serves as an “attention activity” that prepares students to be in a better state for learning, which leads to better learning outcomes in online settings (Palvia, 2000; Simkin, 2013).

For recent alumni, it provides a way to continue to connect with their alma mater and a way to give meaningful professional service through a short speaking opportunity. By the end of the semester, my students had heard briefly from eight recent alumni as they talked about their work experience and experience with the lecture topic. As students listened to someone who had been in their chair a year prior, I am sure they learned something that I could not have taught them.

#### 3.1 Extensions

Readers may think about several extensions or logical ways to progress this idea. Adding virtual guest speakers might lead to other forms of engagement with alumni and professional communities. I discuss a few ideas below.

##### 3.1.1 Creating a Video Library for Classroom Use

Although students find guest speakers who join the class “live” the most exciting, creating a video library of alumni represents a powerful idea. Educators could use these videos in early classes to convey the varied roles that IS professionals have to students. For instance, they could show these videos to upper-division classes to help inform students which jobs they may want to pursue. Educators could also invite professionals back to update their videos or comment in person on updates since the video was filmed.

Such a video library may be instructive and beneficial for several audiences. Students in upper-division IS classes would benefit from context with how professionals use class topics on the job. Personal anecdotes of how a recent graduate obtained a job would be very interesting and serve as a useful example for upper-division students. For students in introductory IS courses who often lack familiarity with information systems and typical roles and jobs that IS graduates take, these videos might inform students about available jobs, what IS is, and what IS people do.

### 3.1.2 Alumni Relations Program

Appearing in an online class represents perhaps one of the easiest ways for alumni to “give back” to their alma mater. If done consistently, this practice might form the basis of an ongoing alumni relationship program. Alumni may view this practice as a standing invitation for engagement and a way to help current students, and it could lead into other larger forms of engagement, such as on campus events, recruiting, and sponsoring class projects.

### 3.1.3 Virtual Panel of Judges

In some IS courses, educators commonly invite a panel of professionals to judge or give feedback on student projects. If students present their projects online, recent alumni can easily join. Alumni may be able to join the group in a virtual break-out session or give feedback in a structured way.

## 4 Lessons Learned

Using guest speakers in this manner represents an exciting way to add student engagement and excitement during online class sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic with minimal coordination time. It definitely made my class livelier, something I have found difficult to do with online teaching. I share a few lessons learned from this practice. First, I invited two recent alumni to speak at the beginning of class. It was good to have two perspectives on the same topic, and the recent graduates often knew each other and enjoyed hearing from each other. Second, senior students commonly asked questions regarding how the speaker got their job. Third, students engage more with question-and-answer (Q&A) session with back and forth discussion between the professor and recent graduate rather than with a speaker monologue. News television provides a useful example of what I want the session to look like: short statements from the guest with interjecting questions from the professor. Finally, I referred to things the recent alumni had shared to illustrate a concept or highlight the topic’s importance later in the lecture.

I found this practice enjoyable and satisfying. I reconnected with recent graduates and they enlivened my class. It found it gratifying to see their willingness to give back by sharing their experiences. This practice helped to strengthen alumni networks in new and beneficial ways. Students appreciated the opportunity to ask questions of the alumni and learn from their practical experience. The need for socialization opportunities for our students has never been greater due to the current global pandemic, and professionals have never been so widely available to join our classrooms.

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