**Inviting Virtual Speakers Bureau Guest Experts**

1. **Contact and Confirm Your Guest Expert**. You will need to communicate with your guest several times before s/he accepts and confirms your invitation. The first contact is to invite and confirm your guest's availability. The second and any subsequent contacts will involve planning the event in more detail. These contacts may be necessary to:
* Confirm dates for students to post their initial questions.
* Identify the manner in which your guest would like to be introduced.
* Agree on when and how often your guest will be available online.
1. **Get a Guest Login** from your institution's online learning system as needed.
2. **Arrange any Payment**. If a fee has been negotiated, start the payment process early to allow for payment to be made in a timely manner.
3. Prepare for Success. The key to a good "visit" by a guest expert is preparation. (See Varvel, Virgil E., Jr., and Mike McNett. Guest Lecturers in the Online Environment. Illinois Online Network: Pointers and Clickers. From <http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/pointersclickers/2001_07/index.asp>.). The following can help make your guest's participation in your course a success:
* Explain the course context and learning objectives as part of your invitation to participate.
* Give your students plenty of time to prepare. For example, if your guest wants your students to read an article or review information on a website, be sure to view and distribute the materials early enough for your students to complete their preparations.
* If yours is an online course, be sure your guest has been added to the class list before the visit.
* Remind your guest of the date, time, and time zone of the visit, and ask that they test their guest login. Provide your phone number and email address, and inform your guest that s/he can contact you if there are login problems.
* Ask your students to prepare questions for the guest. Have them post their questions the day(s) the guest will be joining the online discussion.
* Warn students that your guest may not be able to answer all their questions.
1. **Remind your Students** of the upcoming guest "visit."
2. **Introduce Your Guest** in the discussion at the opening of the session. Following is a sample introduction:

*I'm pleased to announce that, for the next few days, we will have guest expert Dr. Pat Smith participating in our online discussions on particle physics. Please make the most of this great opportunity, and remember that your participation in these discussions is part of your grade.*

*Dr. Smith will be available beginning Thursday, July 15th at 4:00 pm and will be available through Friday, July 16th at 8:00 pm. She is here to share her expertise in particle physics and to answer as many of your questions as she can in the time allotted. Please check in more than once per day to add to and review these exciting online exchanges. [Give Dr. Smith's background information to establish expertise and generate interest.] Please welcome Dr. Pat Smith.*

1. **Thank Your Guest**. In addition to an email Thank You, your guest may also want a letter on your institution's stationary/letterhead for his or her professional portfolio. The following is a sample letter:

Dear Dr. Smith,

*Thank you so much for participating as a virtual guest expert July 15th and 16th in my PHY 321 course.*

*You certainly added a great deal to our discussions about particle physics. Even though my students are familiar with the family of particles, they found your discussion about the "charm of strange quarks" fascinating. And your experience with particle accelerators made research issues and constraints much more concrete for them. They now have a much better understanding of some of the obstacles involved in discovering and verifying new particles.*

*It was a pleasure having you join us. Your friendly tone encouraged students to participate, and your follow-up questioning techniques were a skillful way to re-engage them in the discussion and move them to a deeper level of inquiry.*

*I also appreciate that you volunteered as a guest expert with MERLOT's Virtual Speakers Bureau. Thank you again for your part in supporting the online learning community by making such instructional opportunities possible.*

*Sincerely,*

1. **Follow Up With Your Students**. After your Guest's Participation:
* Provide students with a follow-up discussion or assignments and relate the guest expert's exchanges to ongoing course content.
* Have students provide feedback (can be anonymous) on the value of the guest's "visit.