



Tigers Always Learning: HOW TO HOST A PRINCETON PRE-READ EVENT

Dean Menegas '83
President, Princeton Association United Kingdom
dean@princeton.org.uk

November 15, 2018

Committee on Regional Associations
Committee on Academic Programs for Alumni

Agenda

- Capsule summary
- Why a Pre-Read event?
- Like being back on campus...but even better!
- Key organizational points
- Preparation: before the event
- Agenda: actions during the event; timings
- What's a good number of participants?
- What's the best schedule?
- Key resources on princeton.edu
- Text for your newsletter

Capsule summary



President Eisgruber selects and sends a “Pre-Read” book to all incoming freshmen. During Orientation, he hosts a discussion of the book with the author, several professors, and the entire freshman class.

In an annual alumni Pre-Read event, your region or class members obtain and read the book on their own; and then gather over refreshments to discuss the book, enhanced by video of the on-campus discussion.

Why a Pre-Read event?

- Regions: An ideal annual activity for every region. Pres Eisgruber personally creates fresh intellectual content for it every year, and the campus Media Central creates fresh video content for it every year, but the template for delivering the activity is the same every year. You can assign the activity to a volunteer in your region who will “own” it every year; the first time it is straightforward, and the following years it will be even easier.
- Classes: An ideal activity for mini-reunions in particular cities or regions with high concentrations of classmates; it can be a warm-up event leading up to a major reunion, and a way to connect in off-years. You can even program it into your reunions schedule -- maybe after Friday dinner, or in the gap between the P-Rade and Saturday dinner (P-Rade to Pre-Read!). Intellectual activity is what brought your class together in the first place; this is a great way to continue the tradition.

Like being back on campus....

The Pre-Read program, initiated by President Eisgruber in 2013, introduces new students to Princeton's vibrant intellectual culture. Pres Eisgruber selects and sends a nonfiction book to all incoming freshmen to read prior to their arrival on campus.

During Orientation, Pres Eisgruber hosts a 90-minute Pre-Read Assembly, a discussion of the book with the author, several professors, and the entire freshman class. It's the first class on campus for every new Princeton undergrad. This happens a day before the Pre-Read, when they all merrily process onto campus through the gates in front of Nassau Hall -- a foreshadowing of their first P-Read four years later.

Freshmen also discuss the book and its concepts with student leaders during Orientation, in the residential colleges and on their Outdoor Action trips; and with Pres Eisgruber during the academic year. He notes that this new tradition uses "a shared scholarly text to inspire campus conversations about topics that matter deeply to our community."

...but even better!

- For a regional activity, participants span many decades in age, making for a richer conversation than an auditorium full of 18-year-olds can have
- For a class activity, you all bring years of life experience and maturity to the topic, making for a richer conversation than one you would have all had during your own Orientation
- Everyone can actively participate in the conversation on the same evening -- which isn't possible for the entire freshman class
- Everyone is legal drinking age, and can enjoy a glass of wine or a beer along with the conversation if they choose

Key organizational points: What do you need to host a Pre-Read event?

- One person, willing to moderate the event and spend an hour preparing
- Meeting place, with a large TV or video screen and speakers (e.g. a medium-sized office conference room)
- Alternatives for streaming video:
 - Screen with internet access; or
 - Offline screen that you can use as an external screen for your computer
- Link to the Pre-Read Assembly full video, index, and highlight video on the Alumni Association website:
<http://alumni.princeton.edu/learntravel/academicprogramming/prereads/>
- Drinks and snacks

Preparation: What the moderator does before the event

- Read Pres Eisgruber's special foreword to the book
- Read the book
- Get to know the Pre-Read Assembly video in advance, as much as possible. The more you know the video, the better you can link the campus discussion to your local discussion. You can:
 - watch the full video and take notes,
 - watch the highlight video and take notes, or
 - just refer to the index sheet of the video.

Agenda: What the moderator does during the event

- Switch from the local discussion to the next video segment either (a) when something comes up in conversation that was discussed at the Assembly, (b) when conversation lags, or (c) when you need to move on in order to squeeze everything in.
- You may run overtime, as people get into the discussion. Give people a minute to leave at the posted finish time, then continue the discussion with whoever wants to stay on.
- After the event, please let the Alumni Association know that you held it – they would like to track how many Pre-Read events take place around the Princeton world

Agenda: Timings (flexible)

- 6:30pm Gathering time
- 6:45pm Video of President's welcome and author's opening presentation
- 7:05pm Local discussion
- 7:25pm Video of comments by 1st Princeton professor
- 7:35pm Local discussion
- 7:45pm Video of comments by 2nd Princeton professor
- 7:55pm Local discussion
- 8:05pm Video highlights of Q&A session between freshmen and author
- 8:15pm Local discussion
- 8:25pm More video highlights of Q&A session
- 8:30pm Closing

What's a good number of participants?

- Anything works. 3-4 people can have a great conversation. 8-12 might be optimal for everyone to participate. Plenty of seminars work with 15-20. And they have a campus assembly with all 1,300 freshmen.
- Actively encourage people to attend the evening even if they haven't read the entire book. Everyone already has their diplomas. This is an "audit" seminar, not graded.
- It's not just about the people that show up. The impact of hosting a Pre-Read event reaches beyond the attendees. The several mentions of the event in your newsletter will raise consciousness about the Pre-Read throughout your network. Several other people will buy the book and read part or all of it, even if they don't join you for the event – especially if their geographic, work, study and/or family situations made it inconvenient for them to be in that specific spot at that specific time. And they will be more likely to join you next year.

What's the best schedule?

- This year, you can work it into your schedule at any convenient time.
- In the future, you can choose the ideal time window, and program it in at the same time every year. The Pre-Read Assembly on campus is in early September; it takes Media Central a bit of time to post the video to the web, and the Alumni Association a bit of time to create the “greatest hits” listing. Perhaps schedule it for every year for mid-late October, and when your new season starts you will have one great event already programmed.
- Give notice of the event at least 4-6 weeks in advance, to give people time to buy and read the book.

Key resources on princeton.edu

- Alumni Association Pre-Read Homepage (with link to the Assembly video): <http://alumni.princeton.edu/learntravel/academicprogramming/prereads/>
- Pres Eisgruber's foreword to the 2018 Pre-Read (included in copies of the book sent to freshmen): <https://paw.princeton.edu/article/president-eisgruber-foreword-speak-freely>
- Official Princeton Pre-Read description (including a detailed bibliography of links to official Princeton statements; faculty commentary; books; scholarly articles; surveys and reports; newspaper articles and op-eds; and videos and interviews): <http://www.princeton.edu/president/eisgruber/pre-read/>

Text for your newsletter

Princeton Pre-Read: *Speak Freely: Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech*, by Keith Whittington

Our quest to bring the intellectual life of the university to [name of your region] [the great Class of 'XX] continues, with our first annual Princeton Pre-Read event. Join us!

We will read the book assigned by Princeton's President Eisgruber to all incoming freshmen; and then gather over refreshments to watch video of the discussion on campus with the author, followed by our own discussion of the book.

The Princeton Pre-Read selection for the Class of 2022 is *Speak Freely: Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech*, by Keith Whittington, a Princeton Professor of Politics. The book "demonstrates why universities can succeed only by fostering more free speech, more free thought -- and a greater tolerance of both". It is a timely review of a hot topic. Professor Whittington joined Pres Eisgruber, several faculty members, and the entire Class of 2022 for a spirited discussion of the book.

The book is available on Amazon, in hard copy (<http://a.co/d/gh9HxNV>) and Kindle editions (<http://a.co/d/1BBXhtt>).

President Eisgruber's special foreword to the book is here:

<https://paw.princeton.edu/article/president-eisgruber-foreword-speak-freely>

Join Princeton's freshman class, every year, on an intellectual journey. The Pre-Read is an annual book club, programmed and hosted by Princeton's president, that we all can join.



Q & A

Please enter your
questions in the chat box!