

Publicize Your Event

A checklist for UI faculty, staff, and graduate students

In supporting UI scholars and artists, the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies organizes dozens of events each year, including a major arts and humanities symposium organized a year in advanced and pop-up events organized in less than a week. Over the years, we've learned a number of ways to build a lively, engaged audience. Below you'll find a timeline of recommended publicity activities, including bonus tasks for those with more time, funding, or people power. Our full list of suggestions may look imposing, but if you start by creating a timeline/checklist for the suggestions that make sense for your event and place reminders for to-do items on your calendar, you can do it!

If you don't have the resources for a full publicity campaign, you can simply put your event on the UI Events Calendar, tag co-sponsors and departments and units that might be especially interested in the event to get beyond your small immediate audience, and circulate a flyer via email several weeks before and event and again a few days in advance.

Also, please note that this is mostly a **publicity** checklist. For a guide to administrative tasks associated with planning an event, see the Obermann Symposium Planning Guide: <https://obermann.uiowa.edu/guides>.

Before anything else:

- Decide on a date.** Don't host an event on a holiday (check for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim holidays) or right before a holiday weekend. Avoid home football weekends if possible (for in-person events). Check the UI Events Calendar and co-sponsors' calendars to avoid competing for attendees.
- Come up with an engaging title and description for the event.** Titles of academic papers don't necessarily make good event titles. If you want to engage a public or interdisciplinary audience, keep the title short and clear, and avoid discipline-specific terminology in the description.
- Ask yourself:** What's the primary purpose of this event? Who do we want to be there? If you seek multiple audiences, is there a hierarchy? How do these audiences get information/news? What kind of marketing will they respond to best? How can you make sure diverse audiences feel welcome and that your event is accessible to people who need special assistance?
- Decide whether the event is an end in itself or part of a larger project.** Do you want to arrange for classes to attend? If this is a major event like a conference or symposium, are you expecting speakers to contribute their work as part of a publication based on the event? If so, you'll need a written agreement in advance that specifies the person will share her/his work for publication by a certain date in a specific format. You'll also need to work on securing a commitment (e.g., for a special issue of a journal, an online publication, or volume with a university press).
- Decide whether you want attendees to RSVP/register.** If you want them to, what information do you want to collect on an RSVP/registration form? What purpose will this added requirement serve?
- Reserve space for your event, if it's in person.** You'll need the location(s) for all of your publicity. Keep accessibility and technical considerations in mind (will you need a microphone, projector, computer, etc?).
- Decide whether the event will be recorded.** If it will, get signed releases from speakers in advance and make recording plans.

As far in advance as possible:

- Find one strong, high-res image for the event that evokes the topic.** If you need to use a generic photo, make sure it's copyright-free or you have permission to use it, or buy a stock photo. Check with someone who has design experience to be sure this image will reproduce well and can be used in different formats. *DO NOT CREATE A DIGITAL GRAPHIC FOR THE EVENT THAT CONSISTS OF THE EVENT INFORMATION OVERLAID ON AN IMAGE.* Not only are these images unreadable by screen readers (thus, inaccessible), but images often do not render properly (if at all) on different devices. If you want to design a print poster with an image as the background for the text, that's fine; but *don't* create a poster, save it as an image, and use that image as the announcement for your event on an online calendar, in an email, etc.
- Ask presenters for high-quality headshots, a brief bio, and a short, accessible blurb about their talk.** People tend to drag their heels, so ask early! Tell them if you do not receive the information by X date, that you will use whatever information you can find online.
- If it's a virtual event, create the Zoom webinar or meeting and, if necessary, the Zoom registration link.**
- If it's in person and requires registration, **create the online registration form** (Qualtrics or Google Forms...but note that people on the UI's network at UIHC currently cannot access Google applications).
- Put the event on the UI Events calendar** (<https://events.uiowa.edu/>), paying special attention to the Audience, Department, and General Interest sections. Tag all co-sponsoring units/departments. Make sure to include whether or not registration is required and whether the event is free and open to all. (If you make a mistake when creating your event, REVISE the incorrect listing instead of creating a new one. There is no way for users to delete events once they're created. To delete an event created erroneously, you must email the calendar admins at events@uiowa.edu.) See this guide to posting an event: <https://content.uiowa.edu/home/documentation/adding-event>
- If you have more event information than is reasonable for the UI Events Calendar listing, **create a webpage for the event on your departmental/unit website.** Clearly indicate the topic, time, place, and who should attend. Keep it brief. Add speaker photos and bios and accessibility information. If the URL is lengthy, shorten it—or use a custom bit.ly link—so that it's easy to share.
- Brainstorm a list of potential audiences** on campus and in the community, if relevant. Collect email addresses and send a save-the-date via regular email or a service like Dispatch, Constant Contact, or Mailchimp. Don't forget to include VIPs (presidents, directors, deans) and get your event on their calendars via their assistants.
- Announce your event on your social media channels** and create an event for it on Facebook if your department/unit has a Facebook page. Whenever possible, use images, tag potential attendees to invite them, and tag guest speakers so they'll share with their networks. Remember to include the UI accessibility statement on FB events: <https://bit.ly/2q1sBbd>.

Power plays:

- Ask a group that has a big mailing list and a potential investment in the event to be a co-sponsor and to help you with promotion (e.g., Oaknoll, specific scholarly organizations).
- Identify instructors who might be interested in sending their students to the event. Email these instructors, briefly describing what the event is, providing basic when and where information, and explaining in a sentence how the event is relevant to their classes.

- Buy ad space in *Little Village* (Ads@LittleVillageMag.com), the *Daily Iowan* (<https://dailyiowan.com/advertising-information/>), and/or on Iowa Public Radio (<https://www.iowapublicradio.org/become-an-ipr-sponsor>). Remember to include the UI accessibility statement in all visual ads, as well as to conform to UI brand policy (<https://brand.uiowa.edu/logo>).
- Ask *Little Village* if they would be interested in writing a feature article about the event.
- If event is of interest to undergrads, meet with Campus Activities Board to discuss ways to collaborate or cross-promote events. (One way: Buy display space at the IMU South Entry. You provide the text and artwork; IMU Student Life Marketing + Design will design the poster.)
- Ask an affiliated faculty member to teach a Senior College class related to event topic. (This must be done many months in advance; the program is run through the UI Center for Advancement.)

2 months before:

- If the event contains multiple activities, **finalize the schedule** of activities.
- For in-person events, **decide if you want to provide paper handouts to attendees** (e.g., a program containing the schedule). If so, create these and have them printed by UI Printing Services.
- Decide whether print posters would be beneficial. If they would be, **design a poster** that includes your main image and that answers “Who? What? Where? When? Why?” Be mindful of including co-sponsors and the UI’s accessibility statement. Clarify if the event is open to the public and is free. Conform to the UI Brand Standards and include the IOWA logo: <https://brand.uiowa.edu/logo>. Print via UI Printing Services.
- Share event information—title, description, speaker list, website link, registration link, main image, logos, and publicity plans—with the communications contact(s) at the hosting/co-sponsoring/speakers’ departments** so that they have everything they need to help you publicize the event (e.g., by mentioning it in their newsletters, emailing their listservs, etc.).
- Post to social media about the event** and ask co-sponsoring groups to do the same. Things to share on social media: speakers’ work, videos featuring speakers discussing their work, related articles, news related to the topic. In short, look for content that already exists and share it. Whenever possible, use images, tag potential attendees to invite them, and tag guest speakers and co-sponsors.
- For larger events, **send a save-the-date email** to likely audiences. Feature one or more speakers/talks/etc. to whet interest.

Power plays:

- Add the event to free, online local calendars IF it has appeal beyond campus:
 - *Little Village*: <https://iowacity.scenethink.com/>
 - *Press-Citizen*: <https://www.press-citizen.com/things-to-do/events/>
 - *Cedar Rapids Gazette*: <https://www.thegazette.com/things-to-do/>
 After listing your event to the *Little Village* online calendar, reach out to the *Little Village* web editor to ask if your event can be set as a “featured” event. Always remember to include the UI accessibility statement.
- Inform *Iowa Now* and *Daily Iowan* reporters about the event. This is best done via a thoughtful and lively summary of the event, including topics covered, relevance to audiences, and any

connections to current events/topics. Note that if you inform reporters, they may just well show up! Let your speakers know this, and be prepared to answer reporters' questions.

- Write an op ed about the topic your event raises, including a paragraph on the event itself with date, time, place, a link to the website, and other essential info. Keep it under 600 words and send it via an email pitch to the *Press-Citizen*, the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, or the *Daily Iowan* at least a month before the event.

1 month before:

- Send print posters (if applicable) to campus offices** 3 weeks in advance; post in public spaces less than 2 weeks in advance. Share with co-sponsoring departments or stakeholders to distribute.
- Create and distribute UI digital signage** to departments/offices/units/buildings whose walk-in traffic is your desired audience. You can send your signage to individual depts/units via email or webform (<https://its.uiowa.edu/support/article/1962>) or send a OneDrive link to your signage to the digital sign listserv: its-signagecontent@lists.uiowa.edu. If you do the latter, anyone subscribed to the listserv can post your slide to their sign. Note that all slides must contain the UI accessibility statement. QR codes are OK. Note that different signs have different dimensions, but most are 1920x1080 px. Exceptions: Stanley Museum of Art (1080x1920, vertical); College of Engineering (1920x800); CLAS and International Programs (1920x1200). If you want to distribute digital signage to residence halls, email your slide to hall administrators. You can find them here: <https://housing.uiowa.edu/residence-halls>. Use Canva to easily create your slide.
- Request a UI mass mailing**, if yours is a major event with appeal for the entire campus community: <https://its.uiowa.edu/support/article/3804>
- Continue posting** about the event on social media.
- Find someone to take photos** at the event. This could be someone from your unit who's handy with a camera or a local photographer. Make a list of the events and people you'd most like him/her/them to capture. (Before hiring a *videographer*, consider if this is really necessary. Who will be the audience?)
- Assign roles** to (the rest of) your team for the day of the event: taking photos, posting to social media, counting attendees, handing out programs...
- If the event is associated with/co-sponsored by UI Health Care, **submit event to The Loop** online event calendar (the-loop@uiowa.edu).

Power plays:

- If event is of interest to undergrads, consider marketing in the residence halls (posters, digital signage).
- If the event is of interest to people outside of the UI community, consider sending posters to/ emailing relevant contacts at [Kirkwood Community College](#), [Mount Mercy College](#), [Coe College](#), and [Cornell College](#).
- If the event will likely interest the families of K-12 public school students, send a flyer as a PDF to [Peachjar](#) (ICCS) and Digital Backpack (CCA) admins. Make sure to follow the submission guidelines. To post to Peachjar free of charge, your event must be free of charge. For Peachjar, e-mail Stacia Nkumu at nkumu.stacia@iowacityschools.org; Digital Backpack info: <https://www.ccaschools.org/Page/5251>

- Buy an ad on Facebook, targeting desired attendees and location. On FB, you can also pay to “boost” an event.
- Email instructors teaching courses that might have topic overlap and ask them to announce the event in class or post about it on ICON.

2 weeks before:

- Continue posting about the event** on social media. Remind people of the date, time, and location.
- Hang paper posters in strategic locations** on campus and on community bulletin boards (e.g., ICPL, Iowa City Senior Center, Prairie Lights, Oaknoll, Coralville Public Library, Cedar Rapids Public Library, North Liberty Community Library, coffee shops near campus).
- If you’d like students (particularly undergraduates) at your event, browse the list of UI Student Organizations: <https://uiowa.campuslabs.com/engage/organizations>. Email your flyer or publicity info to the leaders of potentially interested groups.
- If event is co-sponsored by UI Health Care, **send announcement to UIHC publication Noon News** (max 50 words, at least 3 days in advance, noon-news@uiowa.edu).
- Send an email to remind registrants or potential attendees** that the event is coming up.

1 week before:

- Continue posting about the event** on social media.
- Email a reminder to the most important audiences.**
- Send personal reminder emails** to people you especially want to be there, including VIPs, special invitees, and faculty members who have a relationship to the topic. (If this is a major event, you can ask the relevant dean or associate dean, etc., to say a few words of welcome.)
- If there are questions you’d like to ask attendees (“How did you hear about this event?” “What will you take away from this event?”), **create a brief survey** to distribute at the event. This can be a printed survey, a Zoom poll, or an online questionnaire. If the latter, use a QR code to direct people to it at the event.
- If you’d like to collect names and/or email addresses of attendees (e.g., to sign them up for your newsletter), **create and print sign-in sheets.**

Day of:

- Take photos.**
- Save any items that your visitors shared** (e.g., flyers, postcards related to their work).
- Record the number of attendees.**

Power plays:

- Chalk campus sidewalks (if it’s a campus event).
- Use YouTube Live or Facebook Live to stream (part of) the event after getting speakers’ written permission.

Afterward:

- Sum up event on social media**, with photos and/or quotes from participants/speakers.
- Share photos and quotations** with speakers and stakeholders.
- Create a photo gallery** on the event's webpage
- Send thank-you notes** to co-sponsors and visitors and include a link to photo gallery.
- Make a list of things you'd like to do differently** or improve upon for next time.
- If you receive any praise or other feedback from guests, **save it for annual reports** or other reporting.
- Complete any follow-up documentation** of the event, such as a brief report on your website, an article about the event, developing a next steps list to share with participants and co-sponsors, etc.

Resources:

Easy-to-use, free graphic design tools:

Canva: <https://www.canva.com/>

Adobe Express: <https://www.adobe.com/express/> (sign in with "@uiowa.edu" to be redirected to HawkID login)

UIowa templates: <https://brand.uiowa.edu/template-library>

Remember to avoid using red and yellow as your primary colors, per UI brand guidelines.

Free *and* royalty-free photos:

Unsplash: <https://unsplash.com/>

Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/>

Gratisography: <https://gratisography.com/>

UI Photoshelter (photos by UI photogs): <https://uiowa.photoshelter.com/index> (must login with HawkID)

CLAS photos (photos of CLAS buildings and campus events): <https://uiowaclas.smugmug.com/>

Easy-to-use color scheme generators:

<https://paletton.com/>

<https://www.canva.com/colors/color-palettes/>

<https://colors.co/>