

Reunion Virtual Events

Overview and Best Practices

Virtual Events Overview

A year-long approach to class engagement allows for a reunion experience to be inclusive, flexible, and adaptive. Virtual events give you the ability to gather your classmates for discussions in response to current events, and at no financial cost to your class or individual classmates.

The appetite for virtual programming during your reunion year will vary by class. The HAA does not require reunion classes to organize class-specific virtual reunion programming, but it is available as an option as desired by the class and volunteers. Faculty and administrator programming for all reunion classes organized by the HAA will still be available as a virtual program option for your classmates.

Without the constraints of time and space limitations imposed by in-person gatherings, reunion leaders are encouraged to design a schedule of virtual programs and activities that would be most attractive and engaging for classmates. No matter when you hold your programming, you have the opportunity to make it more accessible and inclusive.

- Be deliberate about how you schedule programming to limit drop-off and screen fatigue. Have fun with your formats, topics, and formality. Prioritize interactivity.
- In addition to real-time events, consider asynchronous activities in which classmates can participate on their own schedule. Examples of such activities include posting on social media accounts or Facebook groups, sharing food or drink recipes, short reflective writing activities, athletic challenges, watching videos online, or participating in wellness activities.
- You might also organize class gatherings or discussions following the virtual programs that the HAA is planning for all reunion classes (either immediately after each session, or sometime shortly after). This can be a great way to engage your classmates around these topics, with the benefit being that you don't have to plan a lot of content for this event.

Please refer to the [HAA's virtual engagement toolkit for volunteers](#) for more details in addition to the information listed below.

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- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Harvard University is committed to fostering a campus culture where everyone can thrive, a key to which is ensuring that we each experience a profound sense of inclusion and belonging. Your leadership and featured speakers should be reflective of your class community, and language used in the class surveys, emails, and other materials should be reviewed for inclusivity.
- **Time zones:** Your HAA staff liaison can provide you with a class overview to determine where your classmates are located throughout the world. As you develop programming, mix up the day and timing of offerings to allow for more participation across time zones.

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- **Sharing Zoom/platform links:** For real-time events, share the Zoom (or alternative platform) event link with participants and invitees at least two days in advance to prevent last-minute confusion and requests for help (or if it will be sent closer to the event, be sure to note that in a communication).
- **Recording and Sharing Video:** Record content-rich sessions to share with classmates unable to attend the event (note: you must receive advance permission to record from featured speakers and/or participants). Reunion Committee members will be responsible for determining where to host the videos (and uploading the videos to the platform).
- **No Shows and Attrition:** The HAA has observed a higher rate of no-shows and attendance attrition for virtual programs vs. in-person programs. If your event's numbers drop, please know that this is to be expected and prepare your featured classmates or speakers accordingly. Expect your final event registration numbers to drop by 40 to 50 percent as a general rule.
- **Alcohol:** If you host social programming and include recipes for drinks, consider nonalcoholic options. This is particularly appreciated by those in different time zones, as well as those who don't drink.

Virtual Event Platforms

The HAA College Alumni Programs team recommends using Zoom for your virtual programs. Zoom is accessible and inclusive for your classmates in the following ways:

- **Captioning and transcribing:** Zoom offers automated captions that are largely accurate.
- **Recordings:** Capturing and sharing Zoom recordings is a straightforward process that allows content to be shared quickly and easily with class members who cannot attend in real time.
- Please visit the [Zoom Resources page](#) of the College Alumni Programs Officers Lounge volunteer resources website for additional assistance. Your HAA staff liaison also has extensive experience using Zoom and can assist with your events or help train volunteers on the features of Zoom.

Faculty Outreach

The HAA organizes faculty and administrator programming for reunion classes throughout the reunion year, so we encourage reunion committees to create classmate-focused content for their class-specific virtual events. However, if your class would like to invite Harvard faculty to be part of a speaking event or a panel, please be in touch with your HAA staff liaison as soon as possible to determine the best way to move forward with an ask. They will then connect with a team in the HAA that manages event invitations to faculty who can advise on the best way to make the ask or offer additional/alternative names depending on the event.

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Norms for Virtual Events

Some classes find it helpful to set a positive tone for classmate discussion. Below are some draft norms for your edit or inclusion as you deem useful. At the start of your session, you may want to review norms, share on screens (if applicable), or ask participants to share any additions.

- Listen actively – seek to understand not respond; respect others when they are talking.
- Participate to the fullest of your ability – our community depends on the inclusion of every individual voice. And give space for others to speak.
- Embrace discomfort – be open to vulnerability and willing to challenge yourself to participate beyond your comfort level. When needed, step out of the room (or mute video) and rejoin when you are ready.
- Expect and accept non-closure – these are deep, challenging, and highly nuanced issues and this is an ongoing dialog. We can decide on meaningful actions, but we may not resolve everything (or maybe anything).
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you"). Share your own story as you are willing.
- Be open, curious, and respectful – invite and consider new ideas and perspectives.
- Focus on ideas – do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions.
- Assume positive intent – but honor the learning opportunity and own the impact of the words we use.
- Keep confidence – take actions, lessons learned, and continuing conversations forward without compromising the confidentiality of participants' identities, experiences, or viewpoints.

Social Mixers

- Gather classmates together informally and assign breakout rooms to chat.
- This format most closely mimics the experience of walking through a tent at reunions.
- Breakout rooms can be randomly assigned in groups for time limited cycles or set up as self-selecting to allow class participants to choose their smaller group discussions and move between different breakout groups. Offer discussion topics in the chat to get the conversation started.
- Option to host game night/trivia nights in this format.

House Events

- Gather classmates together informally to celebrate House-based traditions, such as Lowell House Tea, Stein nights, or a new take on your House formals.
- If the event is for one single House, all participants can be in one large "room." Depending on the size of the group, you might decide to go to breakouts at some point.
- If hosting a multi-House event, consider having everyone together for the start and then have breakouts by House.
- If holding a multi-House event (perhaps by House neighborhood), consider how attendees can represent House affiliation/spirit by wearing House attire, using custom Zoom backgrounds, and changing Zoom display names to include House.

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Affinity Group Meet-Ups

- Gather classmates together informally to celebrate affinity groups. This might include career and professional interests, ethnicity and identity groups, hobbies, student organizations, or other groups that might be of interest to your class.
- If the event is for one single group, all participants can be in one large “room.” Depending on the size of the group, you might decide to go to breakouts at some point.
- If hosting a multi-group event, consider having everyone together for the start and then have breakouts by group.

Alumni Panels/Speakers/Glimpses/TED-style Talks

- This format most closely mimics the experience of a traditional session at reunions. Glimpses are short, personal talks by classmates about their lives (3-5 minutes each).
- The virtual setting allows for more classmates to participate as speakers.

Roundtable Discussions

- This format most closely mimics the experience of a “dining hall” conversation at reunions and creates the opportunity for reflection and discussion of topical issues.
- This is a great format to host alumni discussion around timely topics, encourage reflection, or illuminate new connections (such as caring for aging parents, career changes, etc.).
- If hosting one topic, keep all participants in one large “room” depending on the number of attendees.
- If hosting a multi-topic event, assign breakout rooms.

Virtual Book Clubs

- Many classes have published writers. Consider establishing a virtual book club series or standalone event to discuss their works.
- If possible, invite the classmate (writer) to join the book club and/or speak to the group as a capstone discussion upon completion of the book/work.