

English Working Group Guidelines

Working Groups fulfill multiple functions in the English Department. In addition to serving as a hub of intellectual and scholarly exchange across cohorts and faculty working in similar fields or topics, the Working Groups provide frameworks for interactions with scholars from other institutions. Working Groups foster scholarly community among graduate students and faculty in a given field by hosting a variety of events, including reading groups, workshops by participants and invited guests, and work-in-progress sessions (WIPs) required of fourth-year doctoral students.

As intellectual forums, Working Groups give all participants the chance to exchange ideas, feedback, and advice. As professional endeavors, they provide their graduate student coordinators with practical administrative experience relevant to both academic and non-academic careers. And as undertakings in which several cohorts of graduate students work closely with one another and with faculty, they offer important mentoring opportunities.

The following guidelines assist in these goals by clarifying and simplifying the steps for conducting Working Group activities. The Graduate Office offers ongoing support of these guidelines in the form of robust required orientations, resources, and templates.

1. The Graduate Office will set up Box Folders for each Working Group (WG), which will contain these guidelines, a spreadsheet populated with formulas for tracking expenses, checklists for tasks, a timeline, and templates for communications. These folders will also serve as repositories for handbooks and any documentation to be handed down from year-to-year. Coordinators are encouraged to add and maintain materials from past events that will help them to articulate the group's emphasis, scope, and impact to future members and future employers.
2. Each WG should set up a mechanism for making decisions, whether by consensus, majority, or supermajority vote.
3. Each WG must have at least one Faculty Mentor (FM). The mentor is responsible for discussing programming, serving as a resource, and attending the WG's invited lectures. Any WG without a FM in a given academic year will be dormant and not receive funding for that year. This is a return to pre-COVID practices. For any WG with difficulty in securing a FM, the Graduate Chair will advise on potential avenues for moving forward.
4. All working groups should ideally have two or three coordinators. A single Working Group Coordinator (WGC) may run a group, but in that case the number of events should be adjusted to help manage the workload.
 - a. To receive the allotted departmental funding, WGCs must be registered English Department Ph.D. students in good standing. Exception: BCSC is a joint group with Africana, so the WGC may be from English or Africana Studies.
 - b. All WGCs must be in the third-year or above. First and second-year students may not serve as WGCs. Second-year students who anticipate taking leadership positions in the third year must limit any involvement beyond attendance at events to observation and training. They may neither have sole ownership of administrative responsibilities nor run events by themselves, although they may assist for practice.
 - c. Students may only serve as WGC for one WG in a given year.
 - d. Working Groups are extracurricular in nature and therefore should not be prioritized over curricular requirements (coursework, exams, dissertation progress, teaching, fellowship and job applications, etc.). WGCs must be in good standing. If a WGC

has incompletes on their record or has missed benchmark deadlines, they will be asked to enlist an eligible graduate student or faculty delegate to take over any outstanding responsibilities. This step will permit such WGCs to focus on completing their missed work.

- e. Any WG that does not meet these conditions will be dormant and not receive funding for that year. (This, too, is a return to pre-COVID practices.)
5. All official invitations to external speakers must be on the FM's letterhead according to the provided template and honorarium schedule, sent from the FM's UPenn email, and copied to the WGC and the Business Coordinator. The signed invitation with requested information must be returned to the FM, WGC, and Business Coordinator, copying the Associate Director of Graduate Studies (ADGS), as soon as possible so that speakers may be onboarded before the visit, ensuring timely payment and/or reimbursement and proper attention to complexities of international payments. These letters are contracts and, according to university regulations, cannot be signed by students. This approach fosters familiarity with the conventions of professional communication and reduces the labor for WGCs. These official invitations may follow initial emails between the WGC and the external speaker that tender the invitation and address scheduling, talk titles, etc. These initial emails are non-binding but should still be formal in tone, and they should indicate that official invitations will follow from the FM. Sample templates for these initial emails will be provided.
6. Wherever possible, travel arrangements will be made through Concur to limit the need for reimbursements. ADGS can book flights directly through Concur and pay for Amtrak tickets. External speakers who prefer to drive or take local transportation will receive reimbursement for mileage and/or other travel costs according to Penn's policies.
7. All WGCs must complete the Working Group Coordinators Orientation before the first invitation is sent so as ensure familiarity with each step and avoid unnecessary labor or delays in payments. Subject to adjustment, there will be an orientation offered in June, and another in late August or early September.
8. WGs should coordinate so that there will be no more than one event per week involving an external speaker in order to create conditions for robust audiences. There is no scheduling restriction on any WG activity internal to the English Department.
9. In future years, a fair and transparent scheduling process will be developed in consultation with the WGs and GEA. In the absence of a scheduling coordinator for the 2024-25 academic year, WGs are encouraged but not required to adhere to the one external event per week rule.
10. With a minimum 1-week notice, WG event dinners held in the department can be charged directly to the ADGS's department credit card. So that graduate students do not incur expenses for which they must await reimbursement, dinners held off-campus should be charged to the FM's (or another faculty member's) credit card.
11. A \$500 honorarium for invited external faculty speakers will be standardized across WGs. (In accordance with University policy, honoraria may not be offered to Penn faculty or graduate students.) FMs should be cc'd on initial emails to invited speakers so that they can navigate any requests for negotiation of the honorarium.
 - a. For events that may require a larger honorarium (special lectures, symposiums, keynotes, conferences, etc.), the WGC and/or the FM may request an exception from the GEC, which will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis.
 - b. Where a WG is co-sponsoring an event that is not primarily housed in English (a Material Texts meeting, for example), the standardized honorarium need not apply.

Checklist:

June-July

- WG meets to determine leadership and FM. Some WGs already may have mechanisms for doing this already in place (e.g., elections or a succession plan). In the future, groups are encouraged to begin the process of determining leadership, in consultation with the FM and/or the group's members, by the end of the preceding academic year.
- WGC provides these names to GEA and Graduate Office.
- WGC and FM receive access to Box Folder and listserv.
- WGC completes WGC orientation.
- WG and FM determine programming for the year in consultation with WG members. This plan should include any WIPs by current fourth-year graduate student members, events that require additional time and planning (such as the Phyllis Rackin Lecture), and invited speakers whose work reflects the interests of your membership.

August-September

- WGCs populate the calendar with events, with the goal of having no more than one invited speaker event per week (this will be the rule in future years).
- WGC and FM develop a budget for events that does not exceed the annual amount allotted to each working group (currently \$2,500). Co-sponsorship can be helpful. Using the provided spreadsheet, WGCs are responsible for completing, updating, and maintaining an official budget in PennBox that includes all planned and actual costs.
- WGCs create the non-binding invitation and use it to initiate contact with potential speakers, copying FM.
- WGC and FM draft the invitation letter so that FM may send it out, copying WGC and Business Coordinator.

Following Speaker Confirmation

- WGC is responsible for making sure that the Business Coordinator (cc to ADGS) receives the signed letter with requested information before any travel arrangements are made.

Immediately Following Event

- WGCs must send the Business Coordinator and the Business Office (cc to ADGS) the necessary paperwork for invited speakers to be reimbursed for travel expenses and/or paid their honorarium in a timely manner (within 2 weeks of event).

FM Invitation Template

Faculty Letterhead

Dear _____:

On behalf of the _____ Working Group of the English Department at the University of Pennsylvania, it is with great pleasure that I invite you to present a [distinguished lecture/seminar/presentation/conversation/interview/reading] on [subject/topic/title] at [location] on [date and time]. This event will be part of the [type of, if applicable,] Series.

[Several sentences drafted by WG, explaining the reason for the invitation to this scholar, the connection to the WG, and the excitement about the event].

We are offering an honorarium of \$500. In addition, we will cover [detail type of travel expenses]. We are happy to book your airline or Amtrak travel. If you prefer to make your own arrangements or plan to travel in a personal vehicle, you will be provided instructions for reimbursement under separate cover.

To confirm your acceptance of this invitation, please fill out the information requested and email a scan of this letter with your original signature back to me and to [name] graduate coordinator of the [name] working group.

Thank you for considering our invitation.

Sincerely,

Signature of Speaker

Printed Legal Name (as shown on tax documents), Position/Title, Institution

Home Mailing Address

Preferred Phone Number (with country and area code)

If you are not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, please list the type of visa you have, as it may require us to share additional information about payment procedures and tax reporting.