Guidelines for Colloquium Speakers

The Audience. The audience consists of seniors and graduate students in Computer Science. Some will be international students, for whom English is not their native language. They will all have a pretty good background in the basics of Computer Science, but usually are not knowledgeable about any specific industrial or research segment. It’s best to supply plenty of background information to fill in the gaps.

Read the Audience. Experienced teachers and speakers watch the audience to see what is getting through and what isn’t. If it looks like the students aren’t comprehending, ask questions, and rephrase things if necessary. If it looks like they are already ahead of your, feel free to skip things and move a little faster.

Acronyms and Jargon. Define all your acronyms on first use. When speaking to colleagues who are working in the same industry segment, it is natural and efficient to use acronyms and jargon. Students, in general, are not familiar with the jargon of your business, so explaining it as you go makes this a “teachable moment”, and it vastly improves what they take away from your talk.

Speed and Scope. It is tempting to try to convey all you know about your topic in 50 minutes, but it isn’t possible. It’s almost always more effective to present slowly and thoroughly, so the students really grasp a few major points, rather than risk having your talk pass by in blur.

Use Graphics and Multimedia. It’s easy for a PowerPoint talk to get lost in a sea of text and bullet points. It is usually much more effective to use lots of graphics, and speak to these, rather than read down a list. Dynamic graphics, videos, and live demos are even better, where appropriate.

We appreciate what you have to say! Outside speakers who share their professional experience enhance the student experience enormously. Your talk doesn’t have to be perfect – the important thing is that it is real, based on real experience.