Hosting Events with Students at Home

A Guide for Faculty and Staff

It is a long-standing tradition in some departments that faculty and occasionally staff host an event, such as a dinner, tea or brunch at their home. This can provide a welcome change in environment and menu for students, give classes or student organizations an opportunity to socialize in a relaxed environment, or give faculty an opportunity to provide a unique cultural experience to their students. These guidelines are not intended to discourage such events or to suggest that such events should not be held. The guidelines are intended to assist faculty and staff in understanding risks associated with such events, and to aid you in appropriately managing these risks so that you will have a safe and successful event.

1. The Event Must Be Voluntary

All such events, if held at your home, must be voluntary, and it must be made clear that no student will be penalized in any way if they do not attend. On campus meetings can be mandatory. When planning the event, take scheduling conflicts such as athletics, drama or music performances, or other similar commitments into considerations to enable as many students as possible to participate, or plan to have alternate activities to include those students who are unable to attend.

2. Transportation

If you do not live within walking distance to the college, consider how the students will get to your home and make sure that all students who want to attend can get there. If possible, and if your school has the resources, you may arrange for students to drive a fleet vehicle to the event. Please know that all drivers must be credentialed. Some schools may have time limits or training requirements for credentialing, so start early in the semester to make sure that you have credentialed drivers willing to volunteer for this, if you plan to use college vehicles.

Learn more about Driver Credentialing at the Five Colleges (https://www.fivecolleges.edu/riskmgmt/facstaff/driver_credentialing).

Other options: you can drive students in your own vehicle (shuttle them) to your residence if you are a credentialed driver. Students may car-pool using personal vehicles – be sure to inform them that the college considers students using their personal vehicles are doing so for their personal pleasure and convenience, and the college insurance does not cover them for any loss or damage, nor does it cover any of their passengers. If you are on a bus route you may identify public transportation for them. Be sure to advise students of the exact address of the event and a phone number that they can call if they get lost, need to cancel, or will be significantly delayed in arrival.

3. The Meal

Ask your students to inform you if they have any allergies to any particular foods well in advance of the dinner. Certain allergies, such as nut and shellfish, can have life threatening consequences, so plan your menu accordingly. If you are doing “pot luck”, i.e., students are bringing dishes, ask everyone to write down the ingredients on a card so that diners can self-select if they have concerns.
Be sure to exercise due care in food handling, preparation and serving. Be especially careful with poultry products, shellfish and fin fish, raw eggs and other foods that are common carriers of food-borne bacteria. If you are holding cooked foods for service (such as at a buffet), please consult the guidelines linked below for more information. They will also provide detailed information on food ingredient identification.

Read up on proper food handling procedures (https://www.fivecolleges.edu/riskmgmt/studentrisk/food_policies/bakesale).

You should also exercise care and caution if you are using any barbeque, grill, fire pit or other open flame source. Be particularly aware of tripping hazards near any open fire pit and remove or cordon off such hazards.

If you hire a caterer for the event, and the event is college sponsored (i.e., paid for with department funds) you must follow your college's guide to contracting.

4. Serving Alcohol

It is recommended that no alcoholic beverages be served. MA laws on serving alcohol (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXX/Chapter138/Section34) strictly prohibits the service of alcohol to persons under the age of 21, with criminal and financial consequences to you, the host. If you serve alcohol, you must ensure that only students 21 and older have any. "Passing off" drinks by a student who has been legitimately served to an under-age student is, by case law, the responsibility of the host. Private dinners may not require a bartender, but for a large event (more than 20 students) it is recommended that a trained bartender provide all alcohol service, check IDs and cut off service at least 30 minutes before the end of the event.

Read more about handling and serving alcohol at the Five Colleges (https://www.fivecolleges.edu/riskmgmt/facstaff/alcohol_guidelines).

5. Pets

If you have pets, advise your students in advance of the event and understand that some may be unable to attend because of allergies or fears. If that is the case, you may wish to have the event on campus so that all students can attend.

6. Other Considerations

ADA Compliance

If your event is connected to your work at the college, the event may be considered to be a college program and must therefore be accessible. Most people’s homes are not handicap accessible. Accessibility includes not only being able to enter the premises, but being able to use the bathroom and navigate to the areas that the event will be held, as well as participate in the event activities. Does anyone in the group have any physical disabilities that would preclude them from attending? If so, you must relocate the event to an accessible venue.

In addition to physical access, if you are serving food you must consider that some students may have food allergies. Students with allergies may not wish to identify themselves to you, so you may want to
ask invited students to anonymously leave a note in your mailbox about any dietary needs or restrictions that they may have, so that you can ensure that the planned menu will accommodate them. Allergies typically include dairy, nuts, eggs, wheat (gluten), soy, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, shellfish, fin fish, etc. Dining services may have menus that reflect various “— free” menus. Accommodation is not usually too difficult – for example, if you are serving tea, include other non-caffeinated beverages, gluten-free and regular cookies or brownies, and a variety of fresh fruit. For home-prepared foods, consider “publishing” the recipes or ingredients and making the packaging for commercially prepared foods available to participants.

**Discrimination**

Consider the grouping of students that you invite and be sure to include everyone in that group, e.g., a class, your advisees, your research associates, etc. Inviting only selected students (such as inviting only the ones you like or excluding someone who is disliked) opens you to possible claims of discrimination if the student is in a protected class (race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, or disability). You may not be aware that the student is in a protected class. Discriminatory animus does not need to exist in order for it to be alleged.

Additional college policies may also prohibit discrimination whether it is directed toward a protected class or not.

**Personal Liability**

The college insures its employees for claims made against them as long as the employee was acting at the direction of the institution or for its benefit and within the scope of the employee’s responsibilities. For this reason, it is recommended that you advise your department chair or department head of your plans to host a student event at your home and obtain approval from the chair for the event. This does not need to be particularly formal – an e-mail from the department chair signifying approval will suffice if the question arises, but you should include in the request

- Purpose of the event
- Who will be attending (description of group and estimated attendance)
- When the event will take place (date/times)
- Any transportation needs or request

**Premises Liability**

If someone slips, falls or is otherwise injured at your home (including while playing games or jumping on a trampoline), you should immediately inform your homeowner’s insurance agent of the accident. Under that policy, you should have medical payments insurance of either $5,000 or $10,000 which may be made in support of direct medical care without the establishment of negligence on the part of the homeowner. If negligence is established as a cause of the accident, your homeowner’s policy will respond up to your policy limits. If the claim exceeds your policy limits, and if this is an approved college event, the college insurance may cover losses in excess of your policy limits.
**Premises Damages and Other Costs**

Any loss or damage that your premises or property sustains as a result of your hosting the event is your responsibility – the college insurance does not protect you for your property losses. This includes breakage or theft of valuables or any other property damage that might occur in connection with the event.

If you are personally covering the costs of the event, the college’s insurance will not cover any losses.

If the department is paying the costs (catering, transportation) for the event, and the event must be cancelled due to unforeseen events (like extreme weather or fire damage to the premises), the college insurance may cover the loss if the event cannot be rescheduled. Immediately consult with Risk Management if you think that such a situation may occur or that has occurred.

**Sexual Harassment**

It is strongly recommended that no employee invite a student to his or her home if they will be alone together. This is for the protection of the employee as well as the students. Some colleges may prohibit or discourage sexual or personal relationships between students and employees; check your institution’s policies. For these reasons it is recommended that you only invite students to your home in groups, preferably no fewer than three students at a time. Arrange for them to arrive and leave together (have a set time for the start and end of the event). Consider inviting other faculty to the event and/or including your family members, if any and as may be appropriate, as well. If you have questions about what are appropriate boundaries between you and your students, Human Resources and your college’s Title IX coordinator can provide you with assistance.

**Cancellation**

Consider the fact that you might have to cancel at short notice, due to a medical, weather or other emergency. DO have the students “RSVP” for the event, and make sure that you have everyone’s e-mail address and cell number. You may also wish to designate a member of the group to act as your surrogate in the event, to call the attendees in the event of cancellation, in case you are the person who has sustained a medical emergency or other emergency.