

Hosting Events for Students at Your 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 homes. 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.

The guidelines outlined below 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. Hosts assume less liability if the event is voluntary.

Make it clear that no student will be penalized in any way if s/he does not attend. On campus meetings can be mandatory, but when planning the event, take scheduling conflicts such as athletics, drama or music performances, or other similar commitments, into consideration 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. Consider transportation; not all students have the resources to own vehicles.

If a faculty or staff member host's home is not within walking distance of the University, the host should consider how the students will get to the home, and ensure that all students who want to attend can get there. If possible, and if the department has the resources, the host may arrange for students to drive a vehicle from the University's motor pool to the event. All drivers of University vehicles must be credentialed, so it is important that hosts plan early in the semester to identify credentialed drivers who are willing to volunteer. Hosts may learn more about driver credentialing at www.sewanee.edu/offices/sewanee-policedepartment/forms/. 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.

A host can drive students in their own vehicle (shuttle them) to their residence. Important to note is that insurance coverage for an employee use of a personal vehicle on University business is first covered by the employee's automobile insurance policy. The University provides liability coverage in excess of the employee's coverage which covers the University and the employee. Physical damage to the employee's vehicle is not covered by the University.

3. Consider allergies and safety.

Hosts should ask students well in advance of the event to advise if they have any allergies to any particular foods. Certain allergies, such as nut and shellfish, may have life-threatening consequences, and menus should be planned accordingly. If a host is hosting a "potluck," i.e., students are bringing dishes, the host should ask each food provider to write down the ingredients on a card so that diners can choose not to serve themselves if they have concerns about a particular dish. Hosts should exercise due care in the handling, preparation, and serving of food. Hosts should be especially careful with poultry products, shellfish and fin fish, raw eggs, and other foods that are common carriers of food-borne bacteria.

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

4. Avoid serving alcohol unless students are 21, and even then, take precautions.

Tennessee laws on serving alcohol 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 the responsibility and liability 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.

5. Some pets are charming.

If you have pets, you’ll likely know how well they play with others. Take appropriate precautions to consider how pets and students will interact. Some people are fearful of some animals or allergic to pet hair, etc. Additionally, some dogs can be protective and unpredictable. Be wise in considering how students and pets will interact. You may need to advise your students in advance of the event, if you have pets. It is your responsibility to keep your pet under control and usually, pets can be a charming addition to a student event.

6. Understanding insurance

Personal Liability

University insurance may cover its employees for claims made against them if the employee was acting at the direction of the institution 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 (for example, while playing games or jumping on a trampoline), the host should immediately inform your homeowner’s insurance agent of the accident. Under that policy, the homeowner should have medical payments insurance which may be made available to cover the cost of direct medical care without regard to any fault on the part of the homeowner. If fault of the homeowner is established as a cause of the accident, your homeowner’s policy may cover any claim made against you. If the claim exceeds your policy limits, and if this is an approved university event, university 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 university’s 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.

7. Preventing claims of disabilities, discrimination and sexual harassment

Consider the disabilities of your students.

The University values diversity and inclusion. Consequently, we want events to be accessible to individuals with disabilities. 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. Since most homes are not accessible, if anyone in the group has any physical disabilities that would preclude them from attending then please relocate the event to an accessible venue, or make arrangements for that student to participate.

Discrimination: Subtle considerations make a difference.

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, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, or disability). You may not be aware that the student is in a protected class. Intent to discriminate does not need to exist in order for it to be illegal. Additional university policies may also prohibit discrimination whether it is directed toward a protected class or not.

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. 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 the Title IX coordinator can provide you with assistance. The university’s consensual relations policy is available on the Provost’s [webpage](#).

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.