



## International Student and Scholar Services

### MEAL with DePaul: Meet, Eat and American Life! HOSTING GUIDE

*This is an electronic document. Click on any of the links below to go to the resource information that you want to review. You can return to the list of topics by clicking on any topic heading within the document. If you have any recommendations for future versions of this document or questions about your upcoming event and what to expect, please email [iss@depaul.edu](mailto:iss@depaul.edu).*

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[Program Overview:](#)

**MEAL with DePaul** is intended to help international students and scholars learn more about U.S. food and culture by dining with a DePaul faculty or staff member at their home. The meal shared together is not related to a specific holiday, but we encourage hosts to pick a meal that helps showcase their family's culture (for example your favorite meal/comfort foods/family recipes). **MEAL with DePaul** is also a great way for host volunteers to expose themselves and their family members to different cultures and learn more about our global community.

[Alcohol:](#)

Host volunteers should understand that many international students may not use alcohol because of religious beliefs. As a host, you should respect and honor this decision. Also, host volunteers should not provide alcohol to anyone who is under 21 years of age. If your students are over 21, you should not allow him or her to drink excessively.

### Mentoring vs. Advising:

If you make a connection with students and scholars, we encourage you to continue your relationship after **MEAL with DePaul** has ended. Please keep in mind that you should **never** offer your students and scholars information on academic advisement, financial resources, housing, immigration information or job information. If students have questions about these topics, you should direct them to International Student and Scholar Services or their academic advisor.

### Driving:

Please note that if you are not within walking distance of a CTA or Metra stop and plan to drive the students at any point, then you will need to request DePaul driver certification. You can start the [driver certification](#) process online. You may contact [Katie Abma](#) with any questions.

### Emergencies:

If you have an emergency (any issue concerning your health or safety), please call 911 and Public Safety: 312-362-8400. If you need to reach an ISS staff person, please notify Public Safety and they will contact the ISS staff person on call.

### What Happens During Our MEAL?

Like any hosting experience you may have, *anything* can happen! You may have students and scholars show up early or late or not at all. Conversation may be wonderful and rich, but you may also have some awkward pauses.

We have taken several steps to try to help students know what is culturally appropriate in the U.S., but most students and scholars participating have never been to an American's home before and will be making instinctive decisions based on their own home culture. This may or may not be comfortable for you as host.

Below are some helpful hints to help your **MEAL with DePaul** experience go smoothly.

### How to Prepare:

- Familiarize yourself with the students and scholars' cultural background before the meal.
- Remember that what you think of as normal behavior may only be cultural. Try not to be offended if someone is acting differently than what you consider normal, and ask questions!
- Try not to make assumptions about the students and scholars visiting your home.
- Remember that some international students and scholars are shy and quiet. Also, some are not as proficient as others in the English language and may like to listen instead of talking themselves.
- Do not assume that what you meant was understood. Check for signs that the students and scholars did or did not understand you. When in doubt, ask.

- Be open, be yourself and feel free to ask questions. International students and scholars who are participating are there to get to know someone from another culture.

### Getting the Conversation Going:

#### *Optional Icebreaker Game:*

You may choose to initiate your MEAL with DePaul conversation with this optional “icebreaker” game. First, open the [icebreaker link](http://bit.ly/MEALicebreaker) on your mobile phone or tablet. You can also type this address into your browser: <http://bit.ly/MEALicebreaker>. Set a timer for 30 minutes and pass the phone around to give each person an opportunity to answer an icebreaker prompt. Answers to these prompts intend to start a dialogue for everyone to get acquainted with each other. Participants may skip prompts that they do not wish to answer. Click the forward arrows at the bottom of the screen to advance to the next prompt.

*Here are some additional questions you can use to start conversations with your students.*

#### **Family**

- In your country, what responsibilities do different family members have at home?
- How does your family celebrate special holidays? What do these holidays celebrate/represent?
- Describe your extended family?
- What do your parents do for a living?
- Does your family ever go on vacations?

#### **Food:**

- What is the main meal of the day in your culture? Does your family sit-down and eat together for this meal?
- What is your favorite meal, and how do you prepare it?
- What is your favorite cuisine outside of your culture?

#### **Daily Life**

- How do you travel in your home country?
- What do you do to relax after work/school? Do you have any hobbies?
- Do you enjoy/follow any sports? Do you play any sports?

#### **Education**

- What are you studying at DePaul? Why did you choose DePaul?
- What was your primary education experience like in your home country?
- Were you required to learn additional languages in school?

## Why am I Hosting U.S. Students?

Some of you may have a U.S. student included in your group. This is not a mistake! We include our Global DePaul [EDGE](#) team (10 undergraduate freshmen American students) into the MEAL with DePaul program to support their intercultural learning as they learn about international students and their experiences at DePaul.

One of the most frequent concerns our international students and scholars raise is that they don't know how to become friends with Americans. They tell us that U.S. students are busy and hard to connect with. We hope that incorporating a small number of interested U.S. students into this program will allow some personal connections that may help foster ongoing relationships between international and U.S. students.

In the future, we hope to expand U.S. student participation, so that there is one U.S. student in each MEAL event. Why not more? We have found that when more than one U.S. student is placed in this situation, they tend to only talk to the other U.S. student and the group does not integrate.

## Recommendations from Past Hosts

- "Plan on picking them all up at an L Stop."
- "Give students time to talk, as some may have lower English levels than others. Be sure that everyone understands and is following along."
- "Don't go overboard with cooking. Students and scholars will more than likely eat very light and small portions."
- "I would recommend describing the food you made and how we would eat it before starting to eat because I feel sometimes the students and scholars are unfamiliar with our foods and are afraid to ask."
- "I am glad that I scheduled dinner at 5. Some arrived late."
- "When a student or scholar has the ability to add spice/salt/pepper as they desire, it seemed to work well."
- "Provide students and scholars with information regarding household pets."
- "Remember to be aware of dietary restrictions for students."
- "Depending on the group, it may be necessary to prepare a few questions ahead of time to spark discussion."

## Highlights from Past Events

*Each quarter, we ask hosts what they enjoyed most about their MEAL with DePaul experience.*

*Here are some of their answers:*

- Meeting the students and scholars and learning about them and their families, homes, experiences, etc.
- We loved meeting such a diverse group of students and scholars and they were such a treat to host in our home!

- Meeting students and scholars not only brave enough and smart enough to study abroad but to also stretch themselves to meet new people.
- The students and scholars were very happy to be here with us and willing to share their culture and their tastes.
- Getting to share my family's Southern, black cuisine with the students and scholars. Most people don't realize that only Northern, white American culture is broadcast to the world, so America's regional cultures and food are brand new information for these students and scholars. The students and scholars said they loved the food and were fascinated to hear about the diversity within the U.S. This also prompted a discussion of their countries' regional cultures and food.
- Meeting new people and talking to them about their experiences in the US. It was fun to talk about what they expected and what reality was like.
- Watching how much fun my kids had.
- The students and scholars were wonderful - so interesting and polite and appreciative. I also liked that I could include my toddler son, my 75 year-old mother, and a few friends that we invited. I also thought it was very smart that you assigned us 3 graduate students that were the same age all studying at the loop. Because of their similarities, I felt it was likely they would continue to keep in touch with each other now that they have met through this experience. I also appreciated that they were instructed to reach out to email me first in preparation for the meal. This reduced the work / effort on my end, since I only had to respond to a few short emails and then cook a meal.
- The students and scholars- they were so polite, friendly and engaged.
- Hearing student stories from their home countries and culture.
- Learning about their cultures and their experience here. And how much they love Chicago!
- I loved the students' fun personalities and open conversation we shared about our cultural differences.