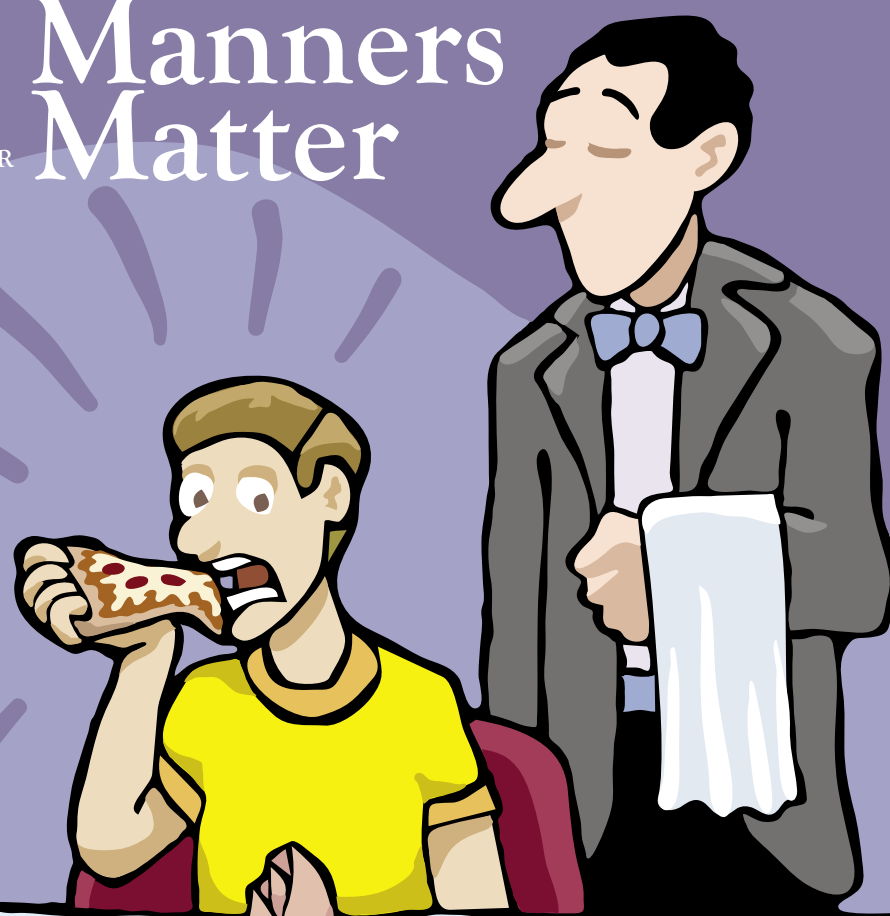


When Manners Matter

BY JENNIFER KARINEN BAUER



In the time spent earning a college education, certain details get overlooked — that the tines of a fork should always face up when the utensil is laid down might be at the top of that list.

With years of bookwork and lectures filling their heads, can students be blamed for thinking of dining etiquette as locating the paper napkin dispenser?

Dine with Style, the first UI-sponsored Etiquette Dinner was designed to help students add a final sheen to their education by teaching table manners over the duration of a four-course meal.

For people likely to have spent the past four or more years in jeans and T-shirts, the event began with a free professional dress show.

Several students confessed that professional clothing had ranked near the bottom of their hierarchy of needs. “I had to buy special clothes for this occasion,” said Lori Jasman, a 21-year-old senior from Sagle majoring in agriculture. “They told us we couldn’t wear jeans. I only own jeans.”

Nathan Larson, a 23-year-old senior in computer science, came to the event in a sharp blue suit. “These clothes came with my apartment,” Larson admitted.

After the dress show, students filed into the Clearwater-Whitewater Room of the Idaho Commons, where banquet tables were set up for a gourmet meal to be tackled with a total of eight utensils, including chopsticks.

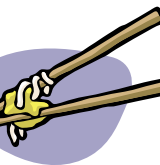
Debra Lybyer, a two-time UI alumna and director of Career Development Services at Lewis-Clark State College, strolled the room with a microphone, guiding the 110 students through the meal that had been put together by several student groups.

“It takes 10 seconds to make a first impression, but much longer to overcome one,” Lybyer told the group.

Lessons on introducing people and the importance of a gentle but firm handshake were followed with a reminder to never talk with food in one’s mouth.

The students at the tables came from a variety of fields and saw the \$15 dinner ticket as an investment in their future, which could soon include an interview with a prospective employer over a meal. Many were planning to attend UI/WSU Career Expo of the Palouse the next day.

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With napkins properly folded in their laps, they began the first course, cold eggplant salad, with chopsticks. “Never wave or stab your chopsticks in the air,” Lybyer advised those contemplating work in foreign markets. “And do not sit them up in rice. That is a symbol of death in some Asian cultures.”

The salad dishes were taken away and the next course arrived, breadsticks and vichyssoise — a chilled potato leek soup. Students listened to directions on sipping soup from the side of the spoon and looked refined as they followed instructions carefully.

Surprised looks greeted the fact that even breadsticks have rules. No dipping, Lybyer told them, and only butter a bite-sized piece at a time. As for the salt and pepper, “they are married,” she counseled. “Always pass them together. And taste your food before seasoning,” she added, “or you may give the appearance of overindulgence.”

As the main course arrived, glazed kiwi pork tenderloin with grilled vegetable kabobs and couscous,

Lybyer gave directions on cutting one bite at a time and wiping with a napkin after every two or three bites.

Always try what you are served, she told them.

Don’t come to an interview hungry.

Don’t order anything messy or on fire.

The meal ended with berry crepes for dessert, and for those looking at the table as if it were a potential minefield, Lybyer issued a final rule, “if you don’t know what do, wait and watch what others do.”

“That’s a good rule of thumb,” said Robert Carlson, a 19-year-old graphic design major from Chicago. “College forges an appreciation of interacting with people from vastly different backgrounds and interests. When it comes to interacting with people, you need these skills. It’s something I’m going to use on a regular basis.”

“Using utensils as language to communicate, that was interesting,” said Karen Wolf, 47, who is working on a master’s degree and certification in education. “I’m close to graduating and I thought it would be a good idea to come. Almost everything I learned was new to me.”

“I felt I might still have things to learn and I did,” said Debra Zambino, a 50-year-old major in textiles from St. Paul, Minn., “think the entire event helped me polish my skills.”

