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## Business etiquette lessons evolve

Higher ed institutions focus on contemporary etiquette to ready students for the workforce.

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*Manners matter—Students participated in a dinner with alumni and professionals from Husson University's local community to learn the basics and the nuances of how to navigate a business function.*

The word “etiquette” may have high-society connotations for some, but in the modern workforce, the ability to act professionally while socializing is a necessary soft skill. This is why higher ed career centers are paying particular attention to etiquette training, often beginning during freshman orientation. But the content of such sessions must be ever-evolving to address current workplace expectations and concerns.

## Coaching appropriate behavior, online and offline

Etiquette is often misunderstood and mistaken for stuffy or artificial, says Diane Gottsman, a Texas-based national etiquette expert. “For students, it’s about learning how to build relationships so they can go out and set themselves apart in interviews.”

In our digitized world, this means teaching students when to put the phone down.

For a generation practically born with a screen in hand, many young college students may not even realize that walking into an interview while on the phone is rude, says Gottsman.

Equally important is training in professional online behavior. “We tell students to have fun with their social media accounts, but to be very aware that potential employers can and will look at them,” says James Westhoff, director of career services at **Husson University** in Maine. Since 2010, the university has offered LinkedIn workshops, as the career networking site has a culture all of its own.

Administrators are also helping students to better understand email communication norms. Using proper greetings with honorifics (Mrs. and Mr., for example) and grammar are focuses at Husson.

## A seat at the table

Appropriate dining etiquette is undoubtedly evolving; now most everyone will pull out their own chair, for example. But no phones and no drinks during interviews are nonnegotiable, says Gottsman.

“I help to teach the ability to conduct yourself at a business meal and look confident, without looking hungry,” she adds. “The way you behave at the table is how you would behave at the staff meeting.”

Recruiters will often conduct second interviews over a meal to see how a candidate interacts socially, and how they handle more awkward moments.

At Husson, 50 students recently attended its third annual etiquette dinner. Some received invitations from the career center and others by professor recommendation. For a nominal \$10 fee, the leisurely five-course meal included one or two professionals at each table; they were sourced from the university’s alumni organizations. Some Husson professors purchased sponsored tables for their students as well, says Westhoff.

Students heard a presentation on dining, silverware and social etiquette from Jean Papalia, career services director at **Tufts University**, who gives such talks at other

schools. Then, they took turns toasting the professional guests at their tables and engaging them in small talk. All wore business-casual or formal attire. As time goes on, business-casual (or tie-free) is becoming more acceptable at business events, says Westhoff.

“It’s so important to remember that the majority of [undergrads] haven’t been through the process before. It’s our duty to show them how to be professional with every step,” he says.

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### **Data Point**

**85%**—Part of success that comes from well-developed soft skills

*Source: Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center study, 2016*

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