

Best Practices for Social Gatherings

We are currently living through a period of broader cultural change that invites us to take a deeper look at graduate education, especially faculty/student relations, and power dynamics more broadly within our disciplines, scholarly communities, and academic departments. We continue to discuss these issues within the College, and we hope that this has fostered ongoing conversations within your departments. It is critical for us to pay close attention to the nature of our professional relationships and how these are shaped by the inherent structural inequalities of academic rank and privilege. Evaluating the types of department social gatherings that we organize and attend is part of a broader process of building student-centered graduate studies programs that are informed by an ethics of care.

The College encourages informal, departmental activities that provide opportunities for faculty and graduate students to socialize outside of classrooms, labs, and formal events. However, it is important to ensure that these events are inclusive of all community members. Therefore, we urge departments to be attentive to the social spaces they create and intentionally host at least some social activities that do not feature alcohol. At events where alcohol will be served, it is critical that departments follow all University regulations ([see AR 6-4](#)) and take steps to ensure consumption levels are appropriate. Please keep in mind that events centered on alcohol consumption, such as happy hours, are more likely to foster nonprofessional behavior and relationships. In contrast, daytime, family-friendly activities may be more welcoming to faculty, staff, and graduate students with young children and those who prefer to not consume alcohol due to religious, cultural, health, or other reasons.

The College recommends departments follow best practices and all University regulations when hosting social events:

- Follow all relevant [University regulations](#) and [human resources policies](#).
- Ensure that at least some departmental social events do not include alcohol consumption.
- When alcohol is served, consider setting a firm end time to the event (e.g., a happy hour that lasts from 6-8 p.m.).
- Rather than an open bar or a keg, provide a limited number of drink tickets to attendees in order to monitor consumption.
- When alcohol is served, provide food and non-alcoholic beverages and ensure that alcohol is not the center of the gathering.
- Remind attendees that they should arrange for safe transportation and encourage ride sharing, especially among graduate students.
- In field-based disciplines where graduate students and faculty regularly live and work together in off-campus settings, we encourage departments to set internal expectations for alcohol consumption and behavior that are in line with these suggestions.

For context, please see these recent articles in *The Chronicle*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and other outlets.

[Report of the MLA Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education](#)

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/To-Avoid-More-Scandals/237008>

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Minefield-How/245441>

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/DrinkingConferencing/240258>

<https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2018/12/some-disciplines-heavy-drinking-part-culture-can-be-problem>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2019/02/25/known-when-drink-alcohol-and-how-much-professional-events-opinion>

<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/01/13/mla-discusses-professors-ethical-responsibilities-training-graduate-students>