

Mason Students, Graduates Learn Networking Skills and Table Manners at Instructional Dinner

By Yara Mowafy

Some 100 George Mason University students and alumni got valuable etiquette and networking tips last Friday, and a chance to apply them in real time, with real potential employers.

Mason students and graduates mix and mingle before dinner at the Arlington Campus. Photo by Silvia Pecini.

Not only did the students learn which fork to use first and when to begin eating, they also learned to put the nametag on the right side (not the left) and how to read body language when engaged in conversation.

The sold-out, three-course meal with 18 “networking hosts” took place at George Mason’s Arlington Campus during a Graduate and Professional Student Networking and Etiquette Dinner. The networking dinner was coordinated by [University Life Arlington](#).

The hosts represented a range of industries and organizations, including nonprofits, government agencies, associations, investment companies, real estate brokerages and law firms.

Cathy Hanson, co-director of the International School of Protocol in Towson, Md., served as the instructor for the evening, guiding diners through the intricacies of American and international table manners, table setting, business dining etiquette and wine etiquette.

Dinner is served at the Graduate and Professional Student Networking and Etiquette Dinner at the Arlington Campus. Photo by Silvia Pecini.

Raechel Hester, associate director of student professional development at Mason’s [University Career Services](#), presented the “Top 10 Things to Do on LinkedIn” to maximize usage and connections.

Following the dining portion of the event, [Robert Deitz](#), policy professor at Mason’s [School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs](#) and former counsel at the CIA and the National Security Agency, entertained the audience with highlights from his book, “Congratulations, You Got Hired: Don’t Screw It Up.”

But the real value, in addition to dinner and a free professional photograph, was in the opportunity to meet—and learn how to behave—in front of potential employers.

“I’m trying to get my name out, trying to meet as many people as I can,” said Mason Law student Evan Purcell.

“Because you’re a grad student, you don’t really get connected with people outside of your department very often,” said Soo Ahn, who is studying education. Ahn said she attended the dinner “to meet new people and to see if there is anything I can learn from the event. I plan on keeping in touch with a few of the people I met.”

Which knife is right? The place setting at the networking and etiquette dinner. Photo by Sarah Parshall.

“It’s always important to learn different networking strategies,” said Tiffani Turner, a reading specialist certificate student who said she had met at least 10 new people at the dinner. She also was reminded of her manners.

“I brushed up on my etiquette skills,” she admitted. “I didn’t realize how many things I had forgotten.”

Main Takeaways About Etiquette and Networking

- Tailor an introduction to an event and bring business cards.
- Engage in conversation, don’t dominate.
- Read body language to know when to move on.
- Jot helpful hints on the backs of business cards after meeting new people to remind you who they were.
- Networking is not about the business, it’s about building relationships so that when those networks are needed, you can use them.
- Never talk about politics, religion or money.
- Put your nametag on the right side; when you shake hands this will be directly in the line of sight.