



Sense of Decorum

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Baylor students get a crash course in table and business etiquette



PASSING FANCY: *Baylor students practice table etiquette at a university-sponsored course.*

The setting: any upscale restaurant, convention center banquet hall, or hotel dining room. The objective: close a business deal, get in a client's good graces—or, in the case of Baylor's soon-to-be graduates, land a job. Regardless of its nature, the mission's success (or failure) is directly tied to the performance of the involved parties.

The first challenge: the table. The place settings, expertly laid out six to a table, appear to be composed of performers poised for an intricately choreographed dance. The multiple forks, spoons, glasses, and plates (each with a different and specific function) wait patiently, ready to spring into action. Their not-so-fearless leader, the diner, takes his or her place with a worried expression, like a director without a script. One wrong move and the entire ensemble could fall apart.

The lessons students learn while at Baylor run the gamut from academic to personal to professional—but dining etiquette has not traditionally been part of the curriculum. Every year, college students across the country attend formal business dinners and luncheons; unfortunately, many of them miss the opportunity to make a favorable first impression due to their lack of dining etiquette and general decorum.

Thankfully, Baylor has picked up on this omission and has now hosted two annual etiquette dinners, sponsored by Career Services and Delta Epsilon Iota academic honor society. The most recent dinner

was held on April 19 in Barfield Drawing Room, located in the Bill Daniel Student Center, and had eighty-one students in attendance. The event's guest speaker, Melina Kaye Kelley '85, of Kelley Protocol in Plano, has made it her mission to teach both students and professionals the art of fine dining and securing that positive first impression. Mastering the art of fine dining, Kelley says, is like many other endeavors—constant practice is the only way to succeed.

The Baylor dinner, a whirlwind journey through business dining, included guidelines for host and guest duties, silverware savvy, napkin know-how, the silent service code (which includes rules governing silverware placement when one is through eating), American and Continental eating styles, toasting, and a variety of other do's and don'ts. Students were most intrigued by the unfamiliar Continental eating style. Unlike the American style, the Continental style does not involve flipping one's fork over to move food from the plate to the mouth; the fork, instead, stays in the left hand and food is moved to the mouth with the fork in the upside down position.

It's a breeze with a piece of meat, but try balancing rice on the back of the fork and it's a different challenge entirely. Most of the Baylor diners eventually opted to eat the remainder of the meal using the already-familiar American style.

Some attendees said they learned a lot of the rules while doing cotillion and debutante balls but that they had forgotten many of them through lack of use. Sunny Nelson, a senior from San Antonio, said, "A lot of it I already knew because my mom taught me, but it's always good to be reminded of the rules and have an unpressured setting in which to practice them."

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After the dining portion of the event, Kelley moved on to professional etiquette, something that college students—and young people in general—often overlook. Kelley emphasized the extent to which employers notice and value general poise and decorum by sharing a story. "Not long ago, I was teaching at a large corporation [in] downtown [Dallas], and the employees were participating in a job fair at a nearby university. Out of three hundred qualified student résumés, the company only accepted five. I said, 'Why is that?' and the person interviewing the students said, 'Well, because they couldn't look me in the eye, and they couldn't carry on a conversation at an adult level; they didn't have the ability to perform even the most basic people skills.' That just floored me."

For students, many of whom are currently vying for a limited number of jobs, Kelley's story was a wake-up call.

Kelley graduated from Baylor in 1985 with a degree in interior design and enjoyed a successful career in that field for a number of years. Also during those years, she became a wife and mother of two, Taylor and Lauren. "As the children were getting older," Kelley says, "I wanted to start working part time. I began working with teenagers and realized that they weren't getting the necessary communication and people skills." Now in her eighth year as a protocol advisor, Kelley speaks at both university and corporate events and also provides one-on-one etiquette consulting and training.

"My passion is really to train and teach, so the more interactive, the better," Kelley says. While she has been to a number of universities, she says that Baylor is still her favorite place to teach. "Any time I get called by an organization here, I just jump on that opportunity," says Kelley, whose husband, Dane, is also a 1985 Baylor graduate. "It was our home, and now, actually, our daughter will be coming here in the fall."

Baylor's etiquette dinner was deemed a success; in an exit survey given by Career Services, students rated the material as being beneficial and relevant to their job-hunting endeavors. Encouraged by this positive feedback, Career Services plans to continue offering the etiquette dinner annually.

— Lauren Elder '10