Dinner with 12 Comets
Host Manual
Dear Dinner with 12 Comets Alumnus,

On behalf of the Jindal School of Management’s Office of Development and Alumni Relations, thank you. Without you, our goal to connect students to alumni would not be possible. For students, the process of meeting and networking with alumni can be intimidating. However, some of the best connections a student can make are with the alumni that came before them. Whether acting as a mentor, providing career related opportunities for students, or simply just giving a little advice; the connection between a current student and an alumnus is invaluable.

We hope that hosting a dinner will be as rewarding for you as it is for the students you host. By allowing students into your home or wherever you decide to host your dinner; you get a chance to reflect on your experiences as a student. You will be able to spread the wisdom you have gained over the years and enlighten students about their career aspirations. As a host/hostess you serve as inspiration for students and a role model. Hosting a dinner also keeps you actively involved with the Jindal School of Management’s alumni community.

This manual should be a good guide to getting you started with planning your Dinner with 12 Comets. However, if you ever have questions, comments or concerns during the planning process, feel free to contact me directly. A member from the Office of Development and Alumni Relations will assist you during your dinner. They will also aid in communications.

Once again, we are extremely grateful for your help with Dinner with 12 Comets. We also encourage and welcome your feedback on ways that we can improve the program. We hope that hosting a dinner with Jindal School students will be a positive experience and that you will be open to participating in the future. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Jasmine Carter
Director of Alumni Relations
UT Dallas, Jindal School of Management
DINNER WITH 12 COMETS PURPOSE & GOALS

Dinner with 12 Comets, an initiative of the Jindal School’s Office of Development and Alumni relations, pairs students with local alumni and friends for small, intimate dinner parties. The goals of this unique program are to provide students the following opportunities:

- Meet Jindal School alumni and friends in a relaxed, informal setting
- Establish connections beyond immediate peer or academic groups
- Develop a higher comfort level networking with alumni
- Experience the broader Jindal School of Management community

Alumni hosts and participants not only get to know current Jindal School students on a deeper level, but also act as role models by sharing life experiences and advice with students while teaching them how to succeed at the Jindal School and beyond. Ultimately, Dinner with 12 Comets is another way the Jindal School strives to bridge the gap between students and alumni.
PLANNING

SETTING UP YOUR DINNER WITH 12 COMETS EVENT

Your first point of contact will be a member of the Office of Development and Alumni Relations team. He/she will work with you to choose a date, a time and the location that would be best for your particular Dinner with 12 Comets event. Additionally, this contact will help with logistics, transportation, communication and implementation of your event.

SELECTING A DATE, TIME AND LOCATION

You may provide us with some date options that would work best with your schedule. The event should last approximately 2 to 3 hours. We recommend that you host the dinner in your own home. This is an easy way to inject charm and intimacy into the program and will help make the evening memorable for everyone. We recognize that not all potential hosts live conveniently close to campus, or have homes where they are comfortable hosting multiple guests for dinner parties, so treating the students to a dinner at a restaurant is a great substitute.

STUDENT GUESTS

Students will have the option to sign-up online for Dinner with 12 Comets and will be paired with you according to their major and interest. Students participate because they are interested in meeting and having dinner with an alumnus within their chosen field. Attire will be dependent on the formality of the dinner you host. Please note, attending students will represent a broad spectrum, of the Jindal School community. You do not need to send out invitations or worry about coordinating a guest list. We will take care of this for you. We will also let you know who will be attending and if there are any dietary restrictions amongst the attendees before dinner.

OTHER GUESTS AND ALUMNI

Although it isn’t necessary, consider having another alumni guest or co-host to help with the hosting duties during the event. A recent graduate or two can facilitate conversation and help student relax. Recent alumni can also benefit from meeting new people and learning about the role alumni play in the University. A co-host can also be useful in a number of ways, including greeting students and helping with preparations. Further, the co-host ensures that there will be someone acting as a host if you need to leave the room during the course of the evening. Taking some time to plan the format of the evening with a co-host (i.e. when to serve dinner, when to make introductions, topics you might like to discuss) will help the evening run smoothly. It will also offer the evening some structure and help nervous students relax.
THE DINNER

MENU

As a Dinner with 12 Comets host, you provide food for the meal hosted in your home. If it is decided that a restaurant is a better option, hosts will treat those students to dinner at a location of the host’s choosing. If you are hosting the dinner in your home, the meal can be as fancy or informal as you like; it’s completely up to you! A few ideas for themes are included at the end of this manual, but are not required. Keep the following things in mind:

- **Cook to your comfort level:** If preparing the meal yourself, choose foods that you already know how to prepare and can handle relatively easily. There is no need to stress about cooking a gourmet meal. Keeping it simple will allow you to spend more time with your guests. Another option is to have the dinner catered; this is one way you can save some time and make things easier on yourself.

- **Dietary restrictions:** Please keep in mind that some students may have allergies and dietary restrictions that prevent them from eating certain foods so it’s a good idea to keep track of what ingredients are in the food you serve in case of student inquiries. A list of restrictions will be provided to you by our team well in advance of the dinner.

- **Alcohol:** Refrain from serving alcohol to your guests. There will be underage students and we do not want them to feel excluded or for you to be put in an awkward situation.

SEATING

We recommend that you schedule 30 minutes or so for mingling at the beginning of the evening to allow the students to start getting to know each other and pass the time until everyone arrives. When it is time to gather at the table, you can suggest a seating arrangement, or simply invite the students to sit where they please. In order to encourage mixing and conversation, we recommend that you try to avoid having all the alumni at one end of the table and the students at the other. We will provide pre-printed place cards, so you can place students prior to dinner if you wish.

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONVERSATION

After everybody has been seated, take time to formally welcome everybody and give them a little background about yourself and why you decided to get involved with the Dinner with 12 Comets program. Going around the table and giving students a chance to introduce themselves is a good way to build on this and can lead to some interesting group conversation. See the last page of this manual for additional information and ideas to keep the conversation flowing.
WRAP-UP

If an end time for the dinner has been established in advance, it is a good idea for the host or the co-host to politely remind the guests of the approaching end at least 15 minutes prior to adjourning. This will give them an opportunity to finish conversations, ask any remaining questions and properly say goodbye.
HELPFUL TIPS & SUGGESTIONS

PREPARE EARLY: The more you can do to prepare for the dinner ahead of time, the easier your evening will go. Having the food already prepared or pre-cooked can save you a lot of time and effort. Little things like setting the table, planning where to hang coats, and setting out snacks will allow you to stay with your guests once they arrive.

KEEP IT SIMPLE: The idea of Dinner with 12 Comets is to show students a warmer more personal side to their university experience. We want the students to feel relaxed and comfortable and therefore we recommend you keep the evening relatively simple and avoid anything too complex. Students may be nervous enough without having to worry about excessive formality.

ATTIRE: We suggest students wear business-casual to promote the relaxed and friendly nature of the program. However, if you feel it might be fun to dress things up a bit, or plan a themed evening, let us know and we will communicate your intentions to your student guests.

ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY: When dealing with students, there are likely to be some last minute cancellations, no-shows, or late arrivals. We will do our best to limit these occurrences or give you advance notice when possible. If a student or two has not shown up by the scheduled time, it is nice to wait a few minutes for them, but don’t delay the dinner too long. It is perfectly okay to begin without late students and let them catch-up when they arrive ----your punctual guests will appreciate it.

CONTACT INFO: We will provide confirmed guests with your contact number where they will be able to reach you on the day of the dinner in case they get lost. Simple things like offering them non-alcoholic beverage, informing them how you prefer to be addressed, or where they can find the washroom can go a long way in helping them relax and be outgoing during the evening.

PHOTOS: We will bring a camera and takes photos of the event. Students will likely bring cameras to the event as well. If you are uncomfortable with photographs being taken, you may want to mention that to the group early on; if not, you may like to suggest a particular background or room where you prefer pictures to be taken.

CONVERSATION: Prepare to spur conversation. With a group of students who may not know one another, there is a chance your group will need a catalyst to get the conversation going. Consider having a few conversation topics in mind (see ideas at the end of the manual). A member of our team will be there to help spur conversation as well.

STAYING IN TOUCH: We will provide you and all of the participants with the group’s contact information. This will allow you and guests to stay in touch with each other, and essential step toward the ultimate goal of teaching students about the power of the Jindal School network.

POST EVENT SURVEY: Following the event, you will be asked to provide feedback regarding your dinner and the Dinner with 12 Comets program. Since Dinner with 12 Comets is a new program, your feedback is very important in assessing the quality of the experience as well as providing suggestions and improvement for future events.
TIMELINE/CHECKLIST

Listed below are a few instructions and general milestones to help you prepare for your Dinner with 12 Comets event.

THE EARLY STAGES

☐ Receive email introduction from a member of the Office of Development and Alumni Relations
☐ Provide your Jindal School contact with the following:
  ◦ Start and end times
  ◦ Your biography (to let students know who you are)
  ◦ Location of the dinner
  ◦ Co-host’s/other guest’s contact information

TWO TO THREE WEEKS IN ADVANCE

☐ Receive a guest list and information regarding any dietary restrictions or circumstances that you will be asked to accommodate from your contact in the Office of Development and Alumni Relations
☐ Provide contact with the following so he/she can send with the event confirmation email to students:
  ◦ Attire for the evening
  ◦ Menu
  ◦ Contact phone number for that night
  ◦ Directions to the location

ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE

☐ Receive an updated guest list and information pertaining to student transportation plans from your contact.
☐ Notify contact of any changes (i.e. menu changes, guest capacity, etc.) and other special requests (signage, a contact distribution sign-up sheet, etc.)
☐ Consider dietary restrictions when planning your meal.
☐ The Jindal School contact will send students participants an email with additional event information or logistics.

TWO TO THREE DAYS BEFORE THE DINNER

☐ Receive a final guest list from your contact.
☐ Contact sends student participants a reminder email.
TIMELINE/CHECKLIST

DAY OF EVENT

☐ 5:30 PM (or as coordinated)
  ◦ Member of the Office of Development and Alumni Relations arrives early to aid in set up.

☐ 6:30 – 7:00 PM
  ◦ Students arrive and mingle with alumni hosts.
  ◦ Pre-printed name tags are distributed to students, hosts, and other guests

☐ 7:30 PM
  ◦ Dinner served.

☐ 9:00 – 9:30 PM
  ◦ Students depart. Don’t forget to take photos!

☐ 9:30 – 10:00 PM
  ◦ Team member aids in clean-up.

WITHIN THE FOLLOWING WEEK

☐ Receive a request for feedback and suggestions from member of the Office of Development and Alumni Relations. Provide your candid thoughts, feedback, and suggestions accordingly.
GOOD FOOD

When hosting a session of Dinner with 12 Comets at your home, dinner can range from catered affairs, simple buffets, or home-cooked fare. Having a theme for your dinner and asking the students to be active in the preparation of their meal can help to spur conversation. If you would like to add a fun, creative element to your dinner, here a few simple ideas:

STATE TAILGATE: Roll out the blue tablecloth and use UTD-related memorabilia as your centerpiece for the idea Panther setting. Grill hamburgers, hot-dogs, and other traditional tailgate fare.

PATRIOTIC: Break out your flags and serve an all-American cuisine. Grill out and dine alfresco!

SOUTHERN STYLE: Show your guests the ultimate in Southern hospitality with a dinner of fried chicken, corn bread, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, corn on the cob, and peach cobbler all served with a tall glass of sweet tea.

BEACH BARBEQUE: If the beach is your favorite place, dip into your stock of chips and dip, soda, hot dogs, burgers and watermelon.

TAKE-OUT: If cooking isn’t your forte, this option requires no cooking or dish-washing; just order a variety of dishes from your favorite restaurant.

TACO/NACHO BAR: Set up all the fixings for a build-your-own taco or plate of nachos.

MINI PIZZAS: Buy individual pizza crusts and have various topping available for everyone to personalize their own pizza.

MARDI GRAS STYLE: If you want to get a little festive, break out the beads and serve gumbo and jambalaya to celebrate Mardi Gras.

CARIBBEN NIGHT: Turn on some reggae music and bring out the blender and the barbecue for virgin pina coladas and vegetables skewers.

FAMILY ON SUNDAY: Does your Dinner 12 Comets fall on a Sunday night? Create a post-dinner ice cream bar for all to enjoy.

FONDUE: Set up platters of meats, veggies and bread for all to dip into. Need a follow-up for the dinner version? Marshmallows, strawberries, fruit and cookies dipped in chocolate fondue are always a hit with any crowd.

“SOUPER” SUPPER: Stir up a variety of soups for all to enjoy, or have a pot of chili on the stove will all the fixings for people to top it off.
GOOD CONVERSATION

Sometimes a little nudge is need to get the conversation rolling. Here are a few suggestions to curtail the occasional awkward silence at the dinner table. You are not required to use these, and you may not need them, but keep these in mind if there is lull in interaction. One trick is to make sure to scatter alumni and guests within the students.

INTRODUCTIONS: Prior to starting the meal, have everyone go around the table to introduce themselves. Introductions can be name, hometown, major future aspirations and one interesting things that Facebook doesn’t know.

WHAT IS A UT DALLAS EDUCATION WORTH: As an alumnus/a who graduated from UT Dallas, share with the students what your education is worth to you now. Focus on how the Jindal School network has helped you personally and professionally and why you continue to stay involved.

CAREER ASPIRATIONS: Ask students about their career aspiration. If they could do anything or work anywhere, what would they do and where would they work?

“I WOULD HAVE DONE THIS IF I’D KNOWN BETTER”: Share some “I would have done this if I’d known better” ideas with the students. Use this topic to bring in students on their future plans, what type of person they are and how do they plan to realize or pursue their dream. As an alumnus/a, you can weave in suggestions and particularly focus on how the UT Dallas alumni network can help them accomplish their aspirations.

During dinner, the conversation will likely start moving naturally and everyone will start feeling more comfortable. With several people, some of whom know each other and some don’t, the group will eventually break into multiple conversations of seat partners around the table. That is ok! It is difficult to hold a large group’s attention at any table. If you still have a lull, here is a list of questions to get the conversation going again:

- Is anyone co-oping or taking a semester abroad?
- What professor/alum has had the biggest impact on you and why?
- What do you do outside of class at State?
- If you were President Benson for the day, what is the one thing you would try to change at UT Dallas?