



Dinner with
12 COMETS



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
Naveen Jindal School of Management

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

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

SELECTING A DATE, TIME AND LOCATION

The event should last approximately two to three hours. We recommend that you host the dinner in your own home. This is an easy way to inject charm and personality into the program and will help make the evening memorable for everyone. We recognize that not all potential hosts have homes where they are comfortable hosting guests. Treating guests to dinner at a restaurant is a great substitute.

STUDENT GUESTS

Students will have the option to sign-up online for a Dinner with 12 Comets. Students 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/a within their chosen field. Attire will be dependent on the formality of the dinner you host. Please note, participating 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 the dinner.

OTHER GUESTS AND ALUMNI

Consider co-hosting the event with another Jindal School alumnus/a. A co-host can help with preparation, greet guests, and ensure the evening runs smoothly. If you choose to work with a co-host, consider taking time to plan the format of the evening (e.g., when to serve dinner, making introductions, and discussion topics).

MENU

As a host, you are responsible to provide a meal for your guests, either in your home, or at a restaurant of your choice. The meal can be as fancy or informal as you like; it's up to you! Ideas for themes are included on page 8, but a theme is not required. Keep the following things in mind:

- ❑ Cook to your comfort level: If preparing the meal yourself, choose dishes you are familiar with and can handle easily. Don't 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. It's a good idea to keep track of what ingredients are in the food you serve in case of 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.

SEATING

We recommend planning on 30 minutes for students to settle in and make introductions. As you gather at the table, you can suggest a seating arrangement or invite students to seat themselves. To encourage mixing and conversation, avoid having all alumni at one end of the table and 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

Once you're seated, take time to formally welcome everyone. Share a little about yourself and why you decided to get involved with the Dinner with 12 Comets. Go around the table and give students a chance to introduce themselves. Conversation tips can be found on page 9.

WRAP-UP

The host or the co-host can politely remind the guests of the approaching event end time at least 15 minutes prior to adjourning. This will give everyone 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 be. Having the food already prepared or cooked ahead of time can save you a lot of time and effort. Little things like setting the table, designating a place 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 simple. 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: 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 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 other 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.

PHOTOS: We will bring a camera and take photos of the event. Students will likely bring cameras to the event, as well. If you are uncomfortable with guests taking photos, mention that to the group early on; if not, you may want to suggest a particular background or room for photos.

CONVERSATION: Help get the conversation started. Students might not know one another and need help breaking the ice. Consider having a few conversation topics in mind (see page 9). A member of our team will be there to help spur conversation, as well.

STAYING IN TOUCH: We will provide each dinner participant's contact information to you and the student guests. This will allow you and guests to stay in touch with each other, an 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 with 12 Comets. 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.

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
 - Location of the dinner
 - Co-host's/other guest's contact information
 - Your biography (to let students know who you are)

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 include with the event confirmation email to students.
 - Attire for the evening
 - Menu
 - Contact phone number for the night of the dinner
 - 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.
- Consider dietary restrictions when planning your meal.
- The Jindal School contact will send student 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

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

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 nametags are distributed to students, hosts, and other guests.
- **7:30 PM** Dinner is 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.

THEME SUGGESTIONS

When hosting a Dinner with 12 Comets at your home, the meal 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. Here are a few simple ideas to add a fun, creative element to your event:

COMET TAILGATE: Roll out the orange and green tablecloth and use UTD-related memorabilia as your centerpiece. Grill hamburgers, hot-dogs, and other traditional tailgate fare.

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

SOUTHERN STYLE: Show your guests some 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 is not 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 toppings available for everyone to personalize their own pizza.

MARDI GRAS STYLE: Share a taste of New Orleans! Break out the beads and serve gumbo and jambalaya. Top it off with a king cake.

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

SUNDAY SUPPER: Does your dinner fall on a Sunday night? Serve a family-style meal and create a post-dinner ice cream bar for all to enjoy.

VIVA ITALIA: Whip up a big pot of spaghetti served with garlic bread, tossed green salad, and tiramisu.

FONDUE: Set up platters of meats, veggies and bread for all to dip into. Need a follow-up for dessert? 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 with all the fixings for people to top it off.

GOOD CONVERSATION

Sometimes you need a little nudge to get the conversation rolling. Here are a few suggestions to make it through the occasional pause at the dinner table:

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

THE WORTH OF A UT DALLAS EDUCATION: As an alumnus/a, share with the students what your UT Dallas 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 aspirations. If they could do anything or work anywhere, what would they do and where would they work?

LIFE LESSONS: Share some "If I'd known then" lessons with the students. Bring students in on their future plans, and how they plan to pursue their dreams. As an alumnus/a, you can weave in suggestions and 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. It's likely that the group will eventually break into multiple conversations. That's okay! Make sure no one gets left out. If you still have a lull, here are some suggested questions to ask:

- 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 UT Dallas?
- If you were President Benson for the day, what is the one thing you would try to change at UT Dallas?