

Turn a Plate-full of Anxiety Into a Job Opportunity

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It's everything your mother ever told you: If you slurp your soup, are rude to a waiter, or talk with your mouth full, you'll be in big trouble.

For job seekers, navigating the ritual of the interview lunch could help determine a candidate's future. Grace and composure during a formal meal could mean the difference between landing a job and pounding the pavement.

How much do you know about etiquette? Career Services and your Student Activities Fee are sponsoring an Etiquette Dinner in the Heritage Room on Wednesday, April 6 at 5pm.

In the business world and in a meal setting, etiquette is an important aspect of how you relate to other professionals in the workplace. Particularly in an interview setting but also in day to day interactions, people notice how you carry yourself.

When you are eating in a professional setting, (and it wouldn't hurt at other times too!) napkins should be on your lap to catch crumbs and drips. Begin eating when the host or hostess has been served and picks up a fork as the signal to begin.

If you have to lean forward or strain in any way to reach an item on the table, it's probably better to ask someone to pass it to you, as it would be bad news to have an unnecessary spill or accident. It is best to avoid alcohol and smoking during a business meeting or an interview, even if colleagues or others are drinking or smoking. You want to present yourself as professionally as possible.

And then there is the silverware. Isn't it overwhelming sometimes when you sit down at a meal and you are not sure which piece to begin with? You need to think about going from the outside in when

it comes to each course. The number of pieces of silverware indicates the number of courses that will be served.

Table manners may be a simple matter, but social graces are just as important in making a good impression during the job interview. Have you had the experience of shaking someone's hand and you get a limp handshake? What does that convey? It means that they may not be feeling confident and are somewhat awkward when it comes to social interaction. Would you want to work with that person everyday? Maintaining eye contact is important at an introduction as well. Connection with others is key to your success in an interview as well as in the workplace.

Lastly, a word about dress for an interview. You need to dress for the interview the way others dress in that particular workplace. For women, that means generally solid, conservative colors, neat hairstyle, and hosiery if you have a suit on, not too much make-up, manicured nails and no perfume. For men that means conservative colors again, neat hairstyle and facial hair, no aftershave, and neat nails. Often, students ask me, "what's wrong with a little perfume or aftershave in an interview setting?" I tell them that you want the employer to focus on the interview and not on how you smell. Also, you don't want to leave an aroma after you leave!

These are just the basic tips, but there are plenty more secrets to a successful interview lunch. Sign up for the Etiquette Dinner or stop by Career Services in General Studies. Call Career Services at 749-6056 for more information.

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Lose, Lose, Lose: Instructor Speaks Out about SRTEs

Stephen Zemyan

Ideally, course evaluations should offer opportunities for students to provide worthwhile feedback and constructive criticism to their instructors, so that they might be able to improve their courses for their future students in significant ways. Regrettably, the SRTE instrument fails both the students and the faculty in this regard.

For a typical course, any conscientious instructor might spend over two hundred hours teaching a class, preparing for it, writing and grading exams, and conducting office hours. Yet, the faculty is required to ask the students to evaluate the results of these continuous efforts over the entire semester in about five minutes by filling in ovals on a scan sheet. How could the results of this patently absurd exercise be anything but superficial and therefore essentially useless?

Mountains of specious SRTE data have been generated, and I seriously doubt that even one course has ever been significantly improved as a consequence. The central purpose of course evaluation – providing thoughtful assessments of key components of a course to its instructor – has been displaced by the inferior purpose of generating easily digestible data for administrators, and students are being used as pawns to generate

it. The candle of reason has been extinguished by pseudo-statistical expediency.

Students should be pounding the table, demanding the opportunity to provide substantive and contributive feedback to their instructors. We would love to hear specific information about what works and what doesn't. Most of the faculty are genuinely dedicated to their profession and crave constructive criticism intended to improve the quality of their courses. It is enormously gratifying for the faculty to see students solve problems, discuss theories, or think clearly about topics as a result of classroom experiences, and we would sincerely like to improve our presentations.

In any rational scheme of course evaluation, the needs of the students and the faculty would be met. At present, however, there exists a surreal subordination to and an over-reliance upon the SRTE instrument. Its regular use supplants a key evaluative component of the instructional process. It provides an opportunity to express hastily formulated vague impressions, rather than considered insight. The mandated use of this plastic substitute is absolutely incomprehensible to me.

Speaking personally, I have always taken my lecturing and

grading duties seriously, but I have never taken my SRTE scores seriously, whether they were high or low, because the SRTE instrument is essentially worthless to me as an evaluative tool. To illustrate my contention, if I receive a score of 5.43 for my "effective use of examples," what am I to do with this information? Which ones of the 300 examples that I presented during the semester need is in need of revision? Is a score of 5.73 or 5.13 received in the subsequent semester really an indication that I am doing "better" or "worse" in explaining the material, or of anything else? As a mathematician, I regret to report that I have no idea what to do with these numbers or how to interpret them.

Everyone loses. The students lose the opportunity to express their worthwhile opinions regarding course content and instruction, and to contribute to the improvement of their courses for future students. The faculty loses the opportunity to consider and apply their valuable advice, and the administration loses the opportunity to understand, appreciate, and reward the valuable educational contributions that the faculty provides on a daily basis to the students. If there was ever a lose-lose-lose situation, this is it.