



STUDENT LIFE

INTERNATIONAL CENTER

MEAL @ Michigan: Meet, Eat, and American Life! *STUDENT GUIDE*

Overview:

Thank you for participating in **MEAL @ Michigan**! The goal of this program is to create cultural exchange between U-M faculty/staff and international students. This exchange is meant to be informal and relaxed, so we hope this guide will ensure that your evening goes smoothly! If you have any questions, or suggestions to add to this guide for future students, please email Kelly Wagner at kellwag@umich.edu.

Transportation Options:

We encourage you to consider a variety of methods for getting to your MEAL @ Michigan host's home. This can include walking, biking, public transportation, ride sharing (Uber, Lyft), car sharing (ZipCar), or taxi. If you are driving or planning to travel via an [Ann Arbor Transit Authority \(AATA\)](#) bus route, you can use [GoogleMaps](#) for directions.

Some hosts have also indicated that they are willing to drive students to/from their home. If your host is providing transportation, be sure to set a designated time and location to meet them on campus in advance of your MEAL date.

What Time Should I Arrive?

In the U.S., it is customary to arrive on-time or within 15 minutes of the start of a dinner party. Do not arrive early, just in case the host is not ready. Your host will coordinate the start time of your MEAL with you in advance.

U.S. Lifestyles

Please be aware that U.S. families are diverse and may look very different from home to home. Some may be single, some may be married. Some may live on a farm, while others may have a condo downtown. While we have tried our best to match students at homes based on the questions you answered in your application, let your host know if you are uncomfortable with anything. For example, even if you said you are comfortable with pets in the home, if their pet is acting in a way that makes you nervous, kindly let your host know so that they can put the animal away in a different room.

Drinking alcohol is common at U.S. dinner parties. Please be aware that the legal drinking age in the U.S. is 21, and it is illegal for you to consume alcohol if you are under that age, even if it is in a private residence. If you are over 21 and your host offers you alcohol, please do not feel like you must accept. If you do not drink due to personal, religious, or cultural reasons, just let your host know. If you do consume alcohol during your MEAL, please be aware that you should not drink in excess or drink and then drive a car.

Emergencies/Cancelling:

If you have an emergency (something concerning your health or safety), contact 911 or DPSS (734-763-1131). If you get lost while traveling to your host's home, please contact your MEAL @ Michigan host directly. Their contact information was provided to you in the introductory email. **If you cannot attend your MEAL @ Michigan dinner for any reason, please inform your host and Kelly Wagner (kellwag@umich.edu) as soon as you know you cannot attend.** If you know a few days in advance, we may be able to invite a student on a waiting list to join that MEAL in your place. If it is the day of your MEAL, consider also calling/texting your host to let them know.

What Happens During Our MEAL?

Like any dinner party, anything can happen! Keep an open mind, and be flexible. You may not like the food, but enjoy the adventure of trying new things and meeting new people. Here are a few tips to keep in mind while participating in this cross-cultural MEAL:

- Remember that what you think of as normal behavior may only be cultural. Do not be offended if someone is acting differently than what you consider to be normal.
- Do not assume that what you meant was understood. When in doubt, ask questions!
- Be open, be yourself, and don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Hosts are just as interested in learning your story as you are to learn theirs. Plan to ask questions about their life experiences, work, and interests.

Getting the Conversation Going:

Getting to know new people can be tough! Here are some questions that you can use to start conversations between your host and other students participating in MEAL @ Michigan:

- **Family:**
 - Where did you live when you were growing up?
 - How does your family celebrate holidays? What do those holidays celebrate/represent?
 - Do you have siblings? What are they like?
 - Does your family go on vacations? Where do you like to travel?
- **Work:**
 - What is your job at U-M?
 - How long have you worked for the University?
 - Where did you study? How was it similar to or different than Michigan?
- **Food:**
 - What is your favorite food?
 - Do you usually cook at home?
 - What are your favorite restaurants in town?
- **Daily Life:**
 - What are your hobbies?
 - Do you enjoy/follow any sports? Do you play any sports?
 - Do you have a favorite TV show?

Additional Tips:

- Bring something to share with your host as a thank you/hosting gift. This is typical for U.S. dinner parties. The gift can be as simple as bringing a small treat from your home culture to share at the dinner (eg: candy, tea, coffee). Students could also bring small cultural artifacts (eg: chinese knot decoration) to give as a present.
 - Whether or not you bring a hosting gift, a thank you email after your MEAL is a great way to show your appreciation. [Click here](#) for thank you note examples.
- If you are bringing your children or spouse with you to the MEAL, please share this guide with them too! It's good to discuss cultural behavior expectations with children before they arrive in a new environment.
- Please keep in mind that there is no expectation that hosts need to continue a relationship with students after MEAL @ Michigan. While we hope that hosts and students continue to meet up afterwards, do not be offended if this does not happen.
- We would also appreciate photographs from your MEAL @ Michigan! If you are comfortable taking photos, please send them to Kelly Wagner at kellwag@umich.edu, and the International Center may use them to promote the program to future participants through social media. If you do not want to be in a photograph, let your host and other participants know.

Feedback/Advice from Past Participants:

"It's a great opportunity to talk to new people and share experiences."

"Relax and be yourself. Be open to accept cultural differences. Be aware of house rules. There are always some commonalities and some differences. Celebrate the common and respect the differences."