



STUDENT LIFE

# INTERNATIONAL CENTER

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

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### 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 hosts, please email Samantha Antoine at [santoine@umich.edu](mailto:santoine@umich.edu).

### Preparing my MEAL:

While this program is centered around a shared meal, please know that the act of coming together is the main goal. If most nights you order take-out, feel free to have your favorite food delivered! If you do cook for your guests, don't feel like you need to prepare a seven course dinner- just stick to what you are used to! Also, the dinner choice doesn't have to be related to a U.S. holiday, but feel free to make a family favorite or a family recipe as a way to share your own culture. The point of the meal is to showcase the diversity of American life outside what students may have seen on TV or in movies, so just stick to what you would normally do for your own family/friends. Lastly, while we suggest that dinners happen from 6-9pm, hosts and students can decide what time works best for them.

### Alcohol

Please be aware that not all students participating in MEAL @ Michigan will be of legal drinking age (21 years old). Also, some international students may not drink alcohol due to personal, cultural, or religious beliefs. If you do serve alcohol to anyone over 21 years of age, please respect a person's decision to not drink, and please be conscious of whether or not students are driving to your home. Even if a student is not driving, do not allow them to drink in excess. **If you are driving students, we advise that you do not consume alcohol.**

### Transportation Options:

Students are encouraged to consider several options for getting to your home. These include walking, driving, public transportation, ride sharing (Uber, Lyft) or taxi. If students are driving or planning to travel via an [Ann Arbor Transit Authority \(AATA\)](#) bus route, we have encouraged them to use [GoogleMaps](#) for directions. If you know directions to your home via GoogleMaps are incorrect, let students know.

Some hosts have also indicated that they are willing to drive students to and from their homes. Hosts providing transportation must have a valid driver's license (not suspended or restricted in any way) and have at least state minimum insurance coverage on their vehicle. We also recommend setting a specific time and place on campus to pick up all MEAL participants.

### COVID-19 and Wellness Guidelines

All participants of MEAL@Michigan are encouraged to take a COVID-19 test before their event. Rapid at-home tests can be purchased at any pharmacy or ordered for free from [covid.gov/tests](https://www.covid.gov/tests). If you feel sick, please cancel your event and try to reschedule with students. Mask wearing is optional, but let your students know if you would prefer they wear a mask while at your home. Ann Arbor and other district libraries also have test kits available. You can [find location information online](#).

## **Mentoring Students vs. Advising Students**

While we hope that hosts and students may decide to continue an informal mentoring relationship after MEAL @ Michigan, there is no expectation that this must happen. If you feel connected to one or more of your participants, feel free to invite them to meet up again for coffee or a meal. Also, please keep in mind that students may want to discuss issues of immigration, employment, course load, and/or financial aid with you. Please refer them to the International Center ([icenter@umich.edu](mailto:icenter@umich.edu)) if this happens, as they have very specific rules and regulations that they must follow.

## **Pets and Home**

While we have tried our best to match students at homes where pet allergies or fears will not be an issue, please pay attention to how students are reacting to your pet. If any student seems uncomfortable based on your pets behavior, size, or other factors, please put the animal away in a separate room of the house.

Also, we suggest that you keep in mind any access issues to your home. This can mean ensuring entries are shoveled/salted if the weather is snowy and that you point out any potential hazards (uneven sidewalk, low ceiling) around your home to students.

## **Emergencies/Canceling:**

If you have an emergency during your meal, contact 911 or DPSS (734-763-1131) for immediate assistance. If for any reason you need to cancel, please contact Samantha Antoine at [santoine@umich.edu](mailto:santoine@umich.edu) and your students as soon as possible, preferably 24 hours or more in advance.

## **What Happens During Our MEAL?**

Getting to know new people can be tough! So, be flexible and keep an open mind. We have provided students with a similar guide to help them know what is culturally appropriate in the U.S., but there may still be some awkward moments or silences. Additionally, some students may require a little more prodding than others to feel “at home.”

Here are a few tips to keep in mind while hosting MEAL @ Michigan:

- Consider reading news articles or cultural overviews about the home country(ies) of your students before they arrive so that you can show interest in learning about their culture, if you are unfamiliar.
- Remember that some international students may not be as confident as others with their English speaking skills. Be patient with their accent and/or the extra time needed to process answers to your questions.
- Just be yourself! Ask questions and remember that you are there not only share your culture, but learn about their culture as well.

## **Getting the Conversation Going:**

Like any dinner party, conversations can vary. Here are some questions that you can use to keep the conversation flowing and get to know your participants better:

- **Family/Culture:**
  - Have you lived in your home country all your life? What city/cities?
  - How often do you travel back home or plan to travel back home?
  - How does your family celebrate holidays? What do those holidays celebrate/represent?
  - Do you have siblings? What are they like?
  - What do your parents do for a living?
- **Food:**

- What is your main meal of the day? Does your family sit-down to enjoy this meal together?
- What is your favorite meal? How do you prepare it?
- What is your favorite cuisine outside your home culture?
- **Daily Life:**
  - What are your hobbies?
  - Do you enjoy/follow any sports? Do you play any sports?
  - Do you have a favorite TV show?
  - How are you liking Ann Arbor?
  - How is Ann Arbor similar/different from where you grew up?
- **School:**
  - What are you studying?
  - What classes are you taking this semester?
  - How are your classes similar/different from where you've previously studied?

### **Additional Tips:**

- Consider planning an ice-breaker activity to introduce everyone who is participating in your MEAL @ Michigan dinner.
- If you are having a lull in the evening after dinner, consider playing a board or card game to continue engagement and pass the time. You could also suggest students bring a game from their own culture to the dinner party.
- We would also appreciate photographs from your MEAL @ Michigan! If you are comfortable taking photos, please send them to Samantha Antoine at [santoine@umich.edu](mailto:santoine@umich.edu). The International Center may use them to promote the program to future participants through social media. Please ask permission to take photographs with your participants beforehand.

### **Feedback/Advice from Past Hosts:**

"I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to spend some time getting to know these bright, courageous students!"

"Have a number of potential activities ready, and let the students choose from them for the after-dinner activity."

"This is the second time we have hosted UM community students and the experience has just gotten better. It has further strengthened our belief in cultural diversity and confirmed that that we can all make a unique and positive contribution, because of, rather than in spite of, our negligible differences."

"The first time might be intimidating so inviting few friends over and do it together with you would help you ease all the anxieties you may have (e.g. fearing to ask the wrong questions)."