

## Cocktails

Cocktail parties are a standard part of the campus events scene. They offer a less expensive alternative to hosting guests for dinner and serve as a pleasant way for people to network.

There are three types of cocktail parties: the simple stand-up cocktail hour at the end of the day; a cocktail-buffet, which is longer and more formal; and the cocktail reception, which is formal and often held in the late evening.

An invitation for cocktails usually means people will stop by on their way home from work or enroute to another function. Cocktails usually last one- to one-and-a-half hours, beginning no earlier than 5 p.m. A cocktail invitation means drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Guests are expected to arrive within 20 minutes or so of the stated time, circulate to visit others, enjoy refreshments, and leave.

### ***Cocktails***

When a cocktail party precedes dinner, plan the hors d'oeuvres to be less filling and to complement the dinner menu. It is acceptable to shorten the length to half-hour to 45 minutes, which is sufficient for all guests to arrive and get situated before being called to the dining room.

Sophisticated guests know not to carry their cocktails into the dining room. Provide small tables or stands in conspicuous places on the route to collect glasses. Regardless of your efforts, some people will insist on taking their drinks to the table with them.

### ***Cocktail Buffet***

A cocktail buffet is an appropriate way to entertain before a theatre or a music performance, a lecture, or an art show opening. Cocktail buffets usually begin about 6 p.m. and last for two to three hours. The quality and quantity of foods offered should be a sufficient substitute for supper, and room setups should include places to sit down to eat. Never use the term "heavy hors d'oeuvres" to refer to this kind of party. Do not invite or expect performers or lecturers to attend cocktail functions before a performance. They need quiet, private, time in order to prepare to perform their best.

### ***Cocktail Reception***

A cocktail reception is a sophisticated, formal (sometimes black tie) party held immediately before or after a performance or other event. A cocktail reception calls for the best of everything, including champagne. If held in the early evening, the menu consists of a sumptuous array of fancy cocktail foods and hot buffet items. If held after an event, add desserts to what becomes an elegant late-night supper. It is acceptable to invite performers to a cocktail reception when it is held after the show.

**Cocktail Basics**

Issue invitations to cocktail parties about three weeks ahead. Hire only trained bartenders. Serve the best brands you can afford from glasses, not plastic. (Do use plastic if you are outdoors tailgating or in a picnic atmosphere.) Use high-quality, cocktail-sized paper napkins imprinted with your school seal or in school colors.

Review with your bartenders the manner of service (serve beer and soda in glasses, please, no cans) and your policy on tipping. Request that bartenders wear a uniform appropriate to the occasion. Hire additional waiters to collect dirty plates and glasses, pass food, and serve drinks. Always offer an adequate and highly visible array of non-alcoholic beverages. Include several stations for food and beverages in order to avoid traffic jams. Close the bar about one-half hour before the party ends to discourage people from lingering.

**Work the Room**

One of the main reasons for hosting a cocktail party is to facilitate friendships. Development officers, alumni personnel, and school administrators need to be especially adept at working a room. This means knowing the purpose of the function, being familiar with the guest list, and skillfully joining and exiting conversation groups. No guest should leave the party without having been greeted several times by staff members.

Arriving guests should be greeted at the door by student ambassadors or staff members. Without greeters, guests can wander in and around the party, anonymously grab a bite to eat, and slip away. Meanwhile, you have lost the reason for hosting them—to make personal contact!

During the event, it is the staff's responsibility to constantly circulate, making certain every guest feels welcome and keeping an eye out for problems (the buffet needs more plates, a spill needs to be cleaned up). All staff members should greet and thank the host and hostess. (Do this even when you are the event planner, and the host is your boss. You are thanking the host and hostess for taking their time to make your event a success.)

Staff members should not be allowed to congregate on the fringes of the event talking among themselves, being engrossed in their phones, or gorging on buffet food. Staff members should limit their alcohol intake or drink non-alcoholic beverages while they are on duty.

**Cash Bars**

Cash bars are offered at functions as a way of controlling costs. Sometimes cash bars are unavoidable, but for the nicest events and most important guests, it is preferable to find another option that is more gracious and still affordable. Requiring guests to pay for their drinks at your party is awkward and not very classy. If you must rely on a cash bar, note it on the invitation so that guests come prepared with adequate funds and arrange a way for people to pay with plastic.

Another reason for the proliferation of cash bars at university events is the misconception that handling alcoholic beverages in this manner exonerates the planner, event host, and school from social host liability laws and lawsuits. This is not true. The only certain protection from alcohol-related lawsuits is to not serve it at all. Depending on how they are set up, cash bars can actually bring more trouble—it is illegal in some states to sell drinks or tickets for drinks without a liquor license.