DINNERS FOR 12 STRANGERS

Dinner Themes

General Themes

“You hear about this thing, Dinners for 12 Strangers, you're thinking a fancy dinner with crystal and china,” says Marilyn Hayes '63. When she and her husband Bob co-hosted a formal dinner with friends Ed Hirsch '61 and his wife Judy, they found that students were left talking to only the people next to or across from them. So, they tried a new approach: tailgate-style.

“We tell them to dress casually, and everybody seems to be much more relaxed and not afraid that they're going to break something,” Hayes says. A table decked out with a UCLA umbrella, UCLA napkins, cups and other paraphernalia greets students approaching the Hirsch's home. They pick up some finger food (with vegetarian options, of course) and carry their paper cups over to gather in the living room.

As students get up to refill their plates of blue-and-gold M&M's, they circle throughout the groups and both women note that almost everyone gets to know each other in the informal setting.

The tailgate has grown to a big event. Hayes' sister, E Juline, and her husband, Association Past President Eric '69, M.S. '70, wanted to join in hosting a dinner, but students could not make the trek to San Diego. So they set up tent at the Hirsch's house and joined in the tailgating fun.

To prepare, the group follows the same routine as they do when preparing for their tailgates at the Rose Bowl – some people bring chicken wings, others the potato chips. “With paper plates it's all easy to clean up,” Judith says. Marilyn Hayes adds, “And you can do a lot of it from Costco.”
More General Themes:

**Beach Barbeque** – If the beach is your place, dip into your stock of chips and salsa, soda, and hot dogs, burgers and watermelon to plan the perfect in-home bash.

**Cabin Fever** – Get your fireplace blazing and break out a few blankets and pillows to sit on, then curl up with hot cocoa, a cup of soup and other comfort food.

**Take-Out** – No cooking or dishwashing required; just order from your favorite pizza, Chinese and Mexican food joints.

**Happy Hour** – If you want a relaxed atmosphere, this may be the way to go. Just serve anything deep fried, accompanied by chips and root beer.

**“Survivor” Party** – Hold contests for food. Last one eating is the winner.

**Beat 'SC** – No explanation needed.

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**Ethnic Food Themes**

You can go Asian without using a wok – as Kathryn Foster '72 and Janet Na '96 did. The two hosted an “Asian Fusion” dinner at Xian, an upscale Chinese restaurant in Beverly Hills.

“Janet and I don't live close enough to get a student turnout,” says Foster. “We know the owners of the restaurant and knew they could accommodate us.” Since most of the students attending went home on weekends, they did not miss home-cooked meals. And Foster didn't miss having to cook, with her busy work schedule. She says, “It was a treat for me, too. I like to share a dinner experience.”

The dinner was a fun experience for all. Foster described the group having “A lot of smiles. They were a very happy and very personable group.” And those happy guests left with a full stomach and chopsticks as party favors.
More Ethnic Food Themes:

**Hawaiian Luau** – Take after Sharon Van Bruggen '97 and Tim Stafford '99 and host a luau. Ask students to wear their favorite Hawaiian shirts or bring straw hats and leis. If roasted pig isn't your thing, try grilled fish.

**Patriotic** – Break out your flags and serve all-American food.

**“Mardi Gras for 12 Strangers”** – Mardi Gras is Feb. 24, so break out the beads and serve gumbo and jambalaya.

**Caribbean Night** – Pump up the reggae music and set your AC on high. Break out the blender and the barbecue for virgin piña coladas and vegetable skewers.

**Pizza Parlor** – Set up a red-checkered tablecloth and serve Italian food.
Pick a country and run with it!

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**Career Interest Themes**

No stranger to the importance of connections, Phil Brock '78 has been hosing an Entertainment Industry Dinner for years, inspired by two dinners he attended during his time at UCLA. Brock will continue to make an impression on students through his yearly dinners, because “it was a worthwhile event when I was a student and is now as a host.”

By inviting alumni industry professionals, Brock gives student guests the opportunity to learn about their industry and make career contacts. A few students even found an agent through the event: Studio Talent Group, of which Brock is president. He says, “Really, when people come up to you at Bruin Woods or want to be represented by us, that means you actually did make an impression.”

More Career Interest Themes:

**Entertainment Blitz** – Oscars are broadcast on Feb. 29 – the night after our first dinner. Just start with a bowl of popcorn and work your way through fancy appetizers.

**Bibliophiles** – Have students recite their favorite passage from a book before eating. Hand out quotes to do with food.
**Pre-Med** – Make sure guests “scrub in” well before eating. Set utensils out on a tray, and serve food you wouldn’t find at a hospital.

**Music Industry** – Ask students to bring their favorite CDs, and take advantage of your own collection. Or, make it a combined dinner with music, communications and law students, and have a discussion on music downloading.