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To wheel and deal, students must show their meal appeal

BY KATHLEEN GRUBB
Associated Press

DAVIS — The suits are sharp, the résumés impressive. What else could a graduate student need to succeed in the cutthroat world of business?

How about table manners?

To make sure they know which fork is which, business students at the University of California, Davis can take an etiquette class through the graduate school of management.

The agenda for this year's seminar promised to teach students how to "dine like a diplomat." But it could have been called, "How to eat a formal meal without disgusting your potential boss."

Good manners may not guarantee a job, but poor manners can hurt an otherwise qualified candidate, Sacramento etiquette consultant Shirley Wiley said during a recent class.

One graduate student with a 3.8

grade point average was a finalist for a marketing job until he was taken on his second interview to a four-star restaurant, she said.

"At the end of the meal, he blew it and he took his thumb to push rice onto his fork," Wiley said. "And that moment, the interview ended."

San Francisco etiquette consultant Syndi Seid agreed that a meal can make or break a candidate.

"We all know that once you put your elbows on the table, that's it," Seid said. "You can't save it. You can't take it back."

The class, after a 1½-hour lecture, ended with a "tutorial lunch" at which students practiced eating continental style — with knife in the right hand and fork always in the left, times down.

"This is not the way students eat," said Cathy Tonsing, a second-year student in the master's of business admin-

istration program.

"Students don't use silverware, period," classmate Robin Moore said.

Seid hovered over the tables as 35 students tried to sip their soup without slurping, experimented with chopsticks and practiced toasting the host.

On the art of eating a roll, she said: "Bread is a very sensitive thing. Overall, you're only supposed to take one little piece off the roll, butter it and eat it. This is true of even the hardest sourdough bread."

Don Blodger, director of student services for the MBA program, said he started the class in 1992 because many candidates for management jobs lost confidence about interviewing over meals.

About 70 percent of students in the Davis MBA program pay the \$15 fee and invest four hours in the class, Blodger said.

TEST YOUR ETIQUETTE QUOTIENT

Here's a sample of what business students at the University of California, Davis learn in their etiquette class.

The questions

- What is the proper way to pass the salt?
- What should you do when you have to sneeze?
- How should you respond to a question after taking a huge bite of steak?
- How do you use a finger bowl?
- Which knife should you use for fish?

The answers

- With the pepper.
- Excuse yourself from the table.
- Too late, you should have taken a bite small enough to swallow.
- Dip and dry one hand at a time.
- The curved one.

Source: Etiquette consultant Syndi Seid



Syndi Seid

Eating can make or break candidate