

## Rice students take a class on class

By DAVID BARRON: Copyright 2007 Houston Chronicle

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A group of Rice University senior athletes learned the fine art of etiquette and professional behavior at a dinner that included a presentation by image consultant Helen Perry.

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Rice University student and kicker on the football team, Luke Juist, is helped by image consultant Helen Perry to get the last bit of his meal during an etiquette class for senior athletes.



Image Consultant Helen Perry shows Rice University seniors the proper way to eat bread.



Perry uses a character she calls Anita Mo Taste to make a point on first impressions.



A student uses a knife and fork to eat a salad Continental style.



Maria Fadool, center, models appropriate business wear for fellow Rice students Clory Martin, left, and Lennie Waite.

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## It's a class about class

Rice University student-athletes learn a lesson that's not found in the books

By **DAVID BARRON**

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### Got manners?

Image consultant Helen Perry offered tips of professional behavior to Rice University student-athletes:

1. Since one wrong decision can throw off the entire table, remember BMW (bread, meal, water). Your bread plate is to the left of your meal plate, and your water glass is to the right.
2. If someone asks for the salt, pass the pepper as well and place them on the table. "Just like a bride and groom, the salt and pepper should stay together."
3. If you leave the table during a meal, place your napkin on your chair or the arm of the chair. When finished eating, place your knife and fork on your plate diagonally at the 10 and 4 o'clock positions.
4. Place used sweetener packages under the rim of a saucer or plate.
5. Don't chew gum in public. It's been three weeks since Perry saw a classical musician chewing gum during a pops concert, and the horror persists.
6. Name tags belong on the upper right shoulder. That way, when someone shakes your hand, they can't miss reading your name.
7. Scoop soup with the spoon tilted away from you, and tilt the bowl away from you when scooping the last portions. "Like ships that sail away to sea, I eat my soup away from me."
8. Tear pieces of bread from your dinner roll. Don't bite into the roll. For that matter, while it was OK for your mom to cut several bites of your steak for you at the same time, it's not OK for you. Cut one bite at a time.

### CLOTHING TIPS

- **Buying:** It's better to buy the least expensive suit at a high-quality clothing store than the most expensive item from a lesser merchant.
- **Cleaning:** Don't have suits dry-cleaned more than once or twice a year. It drains oils from the cloth. Opt for steam pressing as an alternative.

Source: Image consultant Helen Perry

Chris Del Conte is not an unlettered, unmannered clodhopper. He came to Rice University two years ago as athletic director with a master's degree in education administration and a decade of experience as an athletics administrator and fundraiser.

Last week, however, Del Conte told a group of Rice student-athletes of an occasion when he realized he still had lessons to learn about carrying himself in public.

His dinner companion on the evening in question was investment banker Bobby Tudor, a former Rice basketball player. Tudor, a Rice trustee, and his wife, Phoebe, were preparing to donate \$7 million to renovate Rice's antiquated Autry Court.

*"I watched Bobby Tudor walk in, and I saw how he ate and how he handled himself," Del Conte said. "When I asked him how he learned to carry himself, he said, 'I didn't have those tools when I went to Rice. I wish somebody had spent the time to tell me. I had to learn after the fact.'"*

That conversation, and others, prompted Del Conte to schedule a post-practice assignment for about 40 senior student-athletes — dinner at Rice Stadium's R Room, accompanied by image consultant Helen Perry's two-hour presentation on etiquette and professional behavior.

*"Our kids are going against job candidates from Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Princeton," Del Conte said. "A lot of them go into investment banking or the energy industry, and a significant number go on to professional schools. We want to be sure that they have what it takes to make the next step forward."*

And, since so many employees are hired and so many deals are consummated during business lunches and dinners, those skills include knowing which fork to use, remembering on which lapel to place your name tag and learning how to dress and how to shop.

Last week's event, in fact, began with a pop quiz. Before the first course arrived, students had to arrange the jumbled mass of silverware piled atop their napkin into a proper place setting.

*"We didn't have 27 forks (at a place setting) back home,"* said Shaun Rainey of Mont Belvieu, laughing.

Delaying dinner for silverware instructions is a lot to ask of a 300-pound offensive lineman. But Robbie Heos of Pearland, fresh from an afternoon of football practice, was grateful for the opportunity.

*"We've never had this kind of training before, and I know that guys in the past would have loved it,"* Heos said. *"Some of us are getting ready to graduate in December, and we appreciate the opportunity to learn how to conduct (job) interviews over dinner."*

Each course came with a test, such as the proper use of a soup spoon (scoop toward the center of the table, not toward its edge) or the difference between Continental and American styles of wielding a knife and fork.

*"This is very important,"* said Cole St. Clair, a senior baseball player majoring in economics. *"It's a way of representing yourself for the future. It's good to be able to turn it on when you need to."*

Some students modeled clothes from the Houston clothing store M Penner, and others served as models for Perry's tips on what she liked or disliked about proper business attire.

*"I had no clue about any of this," said Caitlin Robbins, a soccer player from Houston who hopes to attend nursing school. "I learned a lot."*

Del Conte hopes to make the business etiquette class an annual event.

*"Without a doubt, (employers) will know that they're dealing with a Rice graduate who deserves this job," he said. "You can earn it with the first impressions that you make."*

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## **Chronicle Online reader comments:**

"I would say undergrad students are in dire need of instruction in proper manners. Hope the program continues."

"Interesting, too, how students - undergraduates as well as graduate students and law students - don't understand that their grades might be great, but they are clueless about the importance of interacting with others (in school) or any organization of people. I'm always amazed why the top law school student can't understand why he's not getting job offers when comes across as arrogant, demanding, insincere - even though he's in Law Review. Those who climb to the top in most organization (or firms) with sometimes less knowledge and ability, are those who know how to 'handle themselves' with others. They have a style that separates them from their otherwise equals."

"This short course should be taught in high school, before the students get out into this great big wonderful world of ours. They need to be taught how to act and carry themselves in front of people of power. This is a vital part of becoming an adult."

"It's amazing to me how much simple table manners have denigrated in our society. I rarely eat out now because I can't stand the sight of people chewing with their mouths open, licking their fingers, talking while chewing, yakking on their cell phones, the list goes on and on. Ugh."