Hospitality:
The friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers.

As individuals, we each have the capacity to express this quality. Whenever we invite an entertainer, speaker, comedian or band to our campus or university setting, we are presented with the unique opportunity of displaying our hospitality talents. Understand however, that true hospitality is work. It's not easy. In fact, it's a job—a hard job that can result in the satisfaction that comes from service-learning. Just like any job, true campus hospitality comes with its very own staff requirements and job descriptions.
Staff Requirements

Training is essential. Consider regular training sessions for your hospitality staff to ensure that all members are aware of your policies and protocol. This way, you can be sure that all who serve on your committee are aware of the requirements for the job. It really doesn't take much thought towards having a hospitable crew. Fundamentally, the staff should be

Keep in mind that your hospitality crew members serve as full-time ambassadors for your school, your organization and your sponsored event. Let your motto be: "At all times act with professionalism." Consider implementing an established uniform for your crew. Not only will this add to the "air of professionalism," it will help your guests easily recognize your crew. A good idea for a uniform might include basic black jeans and a basic black top. Also, consider printing laminates or name badges for your crew. This, too, is an inexpensive way to look professional.

Keep in mind that you want to "look" professional and "be" professional. Therefore, establish a code of conduct for your crew that includes such caveats as:

- No personal autograph requests;
- No personal photo requests;
- No fraternizing with the road crew, management or artist; and
- No wide-eyed groupies.

These may seem a bit harsh, but it is the job of the hospitality crew to make your campus guests feel as comfortable as possible. (It's rather difficult to get comfortable around a bunch of autograph seeking groupies while flashes go off in front of your eyes every few minutes as you try to tune a guitar).

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friendly, but hardworking, with the ability to work long hours while maintaining a smile and pleasant demeanor. Your crew members must be trustworthy and ethically minded. They need the ability to act with responsible independence. It would be a good idea to have at least one person on your team who is both over the age of 21 and has a valid driver's license. If needed, this person can serve as a runner.

Job Descriptions

Once staff requirements and training are in order, focus can be shifted to the job description, which includes staff responsibilities. Your hospitality crew members will have fundamental duties outlined for them by your campus guests through means of the event contract and rider.

Let's check the definition of a contract to make sure we are all on the same page: A contract is an agreement between two or more parties for the doing of something or the not doing of something specified. Simply put—a contract is an open-ended channel of communication between you (sponsor) and your guests (artists). Hospitality is service, and the hospitality section of a con-
Transportation: Air or Ground

Make sure that you completely understand your guest's contract stipulations regarding transportation. Also make sure that you have adequate and dedicated staff to perform the requirements.

- **Air:** If your guests are flying into your local airport, follow these tips to ensure a good pickup. Remember that last-minute scheduling changes often occur. Therefore, it is a good idea to always reconfirm with your artist the correct airline, flight number, flight arrival time and where you plan to meet them. Always arrive at the airport early. Make sure to allow plenty of time to account for traffic congestion and parking. When you arrive at the predetermined meeting place, have a sign boldly displaying the artist's name—this will allow you to be spotted easily among the crowd. As the artist arrives, remain sensitive to the fact that they just got off a crowded plane. Perhaps they wish to be quiet and just get used to "ground legs" again. If the artist is not too talkative, don't take it personally—they may just be a bit jet lagged. Help retrieve their luggage and be courteous. Keep a cell phone handy with important numbers. Remember to give your cell phone number to the artist or agent beforehand. If by chance the artist misses the flight, you can be notified.

- **Ground:** Ground transportation means that you (sponsor) are responsible for providing transportation from the airport or hotel, to your campus, and all around town while the artist is visiting. Generally, the college/university is responsible for providing all ground transportation for an artist. Your artist may need to do some quick errands before your event. Therefore, it is a good idea to have a working knowledge of your town and surrounding area. Be familiar with local restaurants that serve a variety of foods other than typical fast food fare. You may wish to keep a folder handy with several different types of menus. Also, keep in mind where the local dry cleaners, hardware, music, and grocery stores are, as well as their hours of operation. Most of all, be patient, warm, and sensitive to the artist. They may end up spending a considerable amount of time in the vehicle, so try to make it as welcoming as possible.

- **The Vehicle: Limo, University Car or Personal Jalopy?**

  - **Limos:** Regarding the mode of transportation, make sure that you follow the specifics of the contract. If the artist asks for a limo, don't complain, assuming that your guest is asking for special "star" treatment. Usually, there is a sound reason for a limo request. For example, the artist may have height or weight requirements that necessitate more accommodating transportation. Also, the artist may need the privacy and discretion that a limo offers. Avoid making the request to ride in the limo so you and your crew can meet the artist. This is the job of the limo driver. Your job is to make the arrangements and wait patiently on campus for your guest to arrive.

  - **University Car:** If a limo is not requested, a great option for providing good quality ground transportation is a state or university owned car. These cars look very professional because they typically carry the University or State seal placed on the side of the door. Furthermore, these cars receive regular maintenance. This fact eliminates your concern with maintenance and "out of pocket" expenses, such as gas and mileage. Lastly, a state owned car is state insured; therefore, your personal liability is drastically decreased. Using the state vehicle for ground transportation can express a sense of professionalism without being too pricy.

  - **Personal Jalopy:** This is the last option and should be used only in emergencies or extreme emergencies. Issues to consider for using your personal vehicle include: (a) liability for you and the school if an accident should occur; (b) the general neatness (or lack thereof) of your personal car; and (c) the reliability of your personal car. A thought to remember—if your parents or friends have ever complained about the neatness or reliability of your car—don't use it! Remember, your aim is to exhibit professionalism. You surely don't want to be the reason that Mr./Ms. Artist misses your campus gig due...
to being stuck on the highway because your car broke down!

Accommodations: Hotel, Campus, or Your Couch?

- **Hotel:** The best option here is to develop a working relationship with a local hotel chain and give that hotel exclusivity regarding your department’s campus guests. This can begin a two-way relationship of goodwill for both your campus and the hotel of choice. The hotel management gets bragging rights as the “exclusive provider” of accommodations for your campus guests and they can count on your repeat business. Your campus can take comfort in knowing that your guests are in a nice place, tended to by staff accustomed to the nuances and requests of hotel guests. Things to consider when researching hotel amenities for your guests include: location, location, location. Try to get a hotel that is not too isolated. Choose one that has a variety of restaurants and shops within walking distance. Consider a hotel that has room service or a restaurant that provides late night and/or early meals. Also, research what types of phone, fax and wireless services are provided for guests.

- **Campus:** If your campus has facilities that are amenable to the artist’s specific contract requests, then these facilities may be considered. But keep three things in mind. First, the artist wants safety and security. Your campus accommodations should have a private and secure entrance—and none other than a few key people should be aware that the artist is staying on campus. Second, your guests value their privacy. Therefore, don’t subject them to spending the night in a residence hall that may experience a 2 am fire drill or pantry raid. Third, the artist wants to feel at home. Therefore, your campus accommodations should have such amenities as access to an all night restaurant, a kitchenette stocked with necessities (coffee, milk, cream, fruit, juice, etc.) and a private bathroom stocked with soap, fresh linens, and small complimentary toiletries.

- **Your couch:** Sorry. This is NOT an option. Stick with hotel or campus accommodations.

**Dressing Room/Green Room**

Your campus guests need private space such as that afforded by a dressing room and/or green room. Be careful to follow the contract rider specifications and all will be well. Ideally, the dressing room is located on the same site as the performance venue. It allows the artist a much desired place to relax and prepare for your event. Choose a place that is off the beaten path and away from public access. It should be quiet, equipped with a full lavatory and have nice furniture. Make sure that you allow enough time to properly “set” or prepare the room. Speak with the artist or management team to get an idea when the room should be ready. A good general rule to follow is to have the room set no more than two hours before the artist arrives. Use air freshener or candles to give the room a clean scent—consider it your own special artist aromatherapy. Likewise, purchase an artificial floral arrangement, or better yet, splurge on fresh flowers. Do whatever it takes to make the layout of the room neat, comfortable and accommodating. (However, when considering the use of artificial scents or fresh flowers, check to see if your guests have allergies or sensitivities to such things.)

**Food: Catered, Cash Buyout or Deli Platters**

This item is of most importance. Remember that your guests are on the road. They depend on you for a good meal. Furthermore, their desires are outlined in the contract. Don’t smirk at special requests. Perhaps the artists have special dietary or philosophical concerns that behoove them to make such requests.

- **Caterer:** Depending upon the stipulations of the rider, sometimes it may be necessary to use a caterer. Although this maybe expensive—at least your crew will not have to fret over baking fresh chicken Kiev with cream of scallops sautéed in a light mushroom wine sauce. If you use a caterer, direct them to the dressing room, provide assistance, then get out of the way—let them do the job you hired them to do.
• **Cash Buyout:** Sometimes the artist will give your school the option of providing cash, with the understanding that they will purchase their own food. If you accept this option, have the cash ready—not a check! (The artist can't take the school check to Joe's All Nite Pizzeria.) Also, have your runner on hand in case the artist wants you (ground transportation) to make the trip to Joe's.

• **Deli Platters:** If your crew is responsible for assisting with the food, here are some simple and basic things to remember: Keep hot food hot and cold food cold. (If the mayo on your deli platter gets too warm, your artist might end up performing for the local emergency room personnel rather than your intended student audience.) Get your school to invest in two or three coolers. Keep one for fresh ice and use the others for keeping drinks cool. Also, purchase a coffee maker. Use it for making coffee and hot water for tea. Try to provide an assortment of teas and honey. Use nice plates and cutlery—try to avoid plastic. Also, be considerate—don't rush the artist away—even if it's 2 am. (After all, Mr./Ms. Artist just performed a heck of a show for you, right?) So give them the space and privacy they need to unwind. Remain outside the room unless invited inside. If invited inside, don't hang out and go crazy. Remain cool and professional. Stay for a while, then leave. Try not to wear out your welcome. Once the artist has exited the room, look carefully for any items that may have been mistakenly left so you may promptly return them. Then strike it, clean it, and put it back as you found it. Afterwards, congratulate yourselves and celebrate a job well done!

**There You Have It**

So, there you have it, the fundamentals of campus hospitality. Encourage your crew to build upon these simple guidelines. Take the extra steps necessary to make your campus one of the most hospitable places for your guests to visit. If you do, I firmly believe that your campus will become known among artists as a great place to play a gig and an even better place to receive hospitality served up by a staff of friendly, respectful and gracious student “professionals”.

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**Securing the Premises**

Security: if the artist requests it—they need it—so don't question it, just provide it. If the contract calls for licensed, bonded security, then contact your local sheriff or a private firm. If security is not requested per the contract, then consider providing it anyway. Post a student team outside the door to “guard” the dressing room. It is good to have two students for the sake of accountability. Keep in mind that once the room is “set”—it then becomes off limits for anyone other than the artist (this means you, your crew and your friends). Do not allow people to hang around or peek inside. Protect the integrity of the room, the privacy of the space and your reputation as a “professional.”

**Striking the Room After the Event**

Only when the artist has left the room is it safe to venture back inside. However, great place to play a gig and an even better place to receive hospitality served up by a staff of friendly, respectful and gracious student “professionals.”

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**About the Author**

**Mimi Thomas** is a career coordinator in the College of Basic and Applied Sciences at Middle Tennessee State University. Previously, she served as assistant director of Student Programming. She held a staff position for eight years. Before joining the Student Programming office as a professional, she served it as a student committee chair, then as a graduate assistant. In NACA, she served on the former Southeast Region’s Showcase Selection Committee and participated in the region’s Reverse Exhibit Hall. She also attended NACA’s Contemporary Concert and Promotion Workshop in 1997. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's degree in English, both from Middle Tennessee State University. This is her first article for Programming magazine.