Section 6: Social events and activities

Social activities, even those of an informal kind, such as clubs, discussion groups, sports teams, and social outreach programs, can help to make a department a community. At the same time, they pose challenges along multiple dimensions, and attention to these considerations can help avert some of the most serious problems a philosophical community can face.

Social activities and inclusivity
While departments may be mindful of questions of inclusion for official events, informal activities by their nature tend to be organized in a decentralized way, and departments, faculty, or students may not be aware that certain groups of individuals are informally excluded by the nature of the activities, lack of funds, or living arrangements. Therefore, it is important that departments make an effort to review on a regular basis what kinds of informal activities are available to students and faculty, ask whether the range of activities provides everyone with some opportunity to take part, and encourage faculty and students to be attentive to these considerations when planning or taking part in such activities. This section discusses various dimensions of social events that departments may wish to consider.

Social events and alcohol
It is often suggested that professional philosophy in the English-speaking world has a “drinking culture.” Whether or not this is the case, it is certainly true that many departments sponsor multiple kinds of events in the course of the academic year involving faculty and students where alcohol is served. And in any environment where alcohol is served, drinking can lead to behavior that is problematic in a wide range of ways, from offensive or harassing conduct to behavior that is aggressive, dangerous, or illegal. Events involving philosophers are no exception.

Recommended practices in the area of social events and alcohol concern not only mitigating the possibility of unprofessional or dangerous behavior, but enhancing inclusiveness. Faculty and students may choose not to drink or to drink very little for a variety of reasons—it might be a personal matter, have a religious basis, be connected with a health issue (that the individual may not wish to make public), or be a question of prudence (for example, if they plan to drive following the event). Making an effort to prevent such individuals from being marginalized by the choice of venue or character of an event is important for creating an open, diverse departmental culture. Those new to the department or lacking in seniority can be under special pressure to drink more than they would like to in order to fit in, while others can come to feel that not participating in drinking activities could limit their access to socializing, or to meeting and conversing with colleagues or departmental visitors. At the most extreme, such considerations could give rise to the worry that philosophy as a professional pursuit is not for them.

Recognizing the important role that departments can play in shaping their own culture, the following guidelines are suggested for social events where alcohol is available to be consumed. In this context, the phrase “social events” refers to events that officially fall under departmental auspices. This would include departmental receptions for new or retiring faculty and guest speakers, as well as departmentally sponsored picnics, parties, dinners, or other kinds of social gatherings. These guidelines are not meant to cover non-departmentally funded parties at the home of a member of the department, nor the informal socializing over alcohol that occurs when a group of students on campus become involved in philosophical
conversation and decide to continue the conversation at a nearby bar. Informal socializing among faculty and students at a bar following an evening seminar or a class presents a special case; here too good practices can be identified.

- Departments planning to hold social events at which alcohol will be served should thoroughly familiarize themselves with relevant institutional policies and adhere to these policies in organizing and holding the event.

- Departments should take steps, as best they can, to ensure that for social events involving alcohol, drinking itself does not appear to be the focal point of the event. (An example of an event that would appear to “feature” alcohol would be a departmental event that will take place at a bar, or a departmental picnic at which a truck from a local brewery would be present.)

- Non-alcoholic beverages should be available at all social events involving alcohol; such beverages should be as centrally and readily available as those containing alcohol, and those who choose not to drink alcohol should not be made conspicuous or marginalized.

- Departments should discuss the value of promoting drinking in moderation at departmental social events. Steps that could be taken include limiting the number of drinks per person through the distribution of drink tickets, limiting the length of the event, and limiting the amount of alcohol served.

- Some institutions have taken the step of requiring that, at events where alcohol is served, a member of the department with training in good practices with regard to alcohol must be present. Such individuals can also be designated as persons to whom any concerns about alcohol-related behavior at the event could be communicated.

- In situations where instructors (including graduate teaching assistants) and students decide to adjourn to an informal location following a class or seminar, instructors should be aware that the choice of a bar as the locale is one of several options. At a minimum, before a bar is chosen, instructors should ensure that all students are above drinking age. But if bars are habitually chosen, instructors should be aware that this could have a discouraging and marginalizing effect on students who feel uncomfortable about going to bars or who for any reason prefer or need not to drink alcohol. Such informal interactions are an important part of the educational experience, and care should be taken so that students do not feel excluded from them. Varying the venue for such post-class socializing, e.g., by going to a coffee shop or café, can enhance inclusivity.

**Accessibility of social events, conferences, and other meetings**

Philosophy departments today, and their members, host a large range of different events: public lectures, conferences, colloquia, workshops, forums, and club meetings, among others. It is important to ask whether adequate measures have been taken in the planning of such events to make them accessible to those who might have limited mobility or disabilities.

Clearly, it will be a matter of judgment which concerns about accessibility should be taken into account for a given kind of event. To help members and departments think about the spectrum of issues and instrumentalities in providing accommodation, we are reproducing here, with minor alterations, an accessibility and accommodation checklist, assembled by Kelsey Borrowman, in her role as editorial
Accessibility and accommodation checklist

The following checklist is tailored to larger conferences with open submissions, but can be adapted to thematic conferences, smaller workshops, etc., as appropriate:

- Consult a member of the APA Committee on Inclusiveness in the Profession, or someone familiar with and working on disability issues.
- Consider inviting disabled philosophers to contribute a paper or panel.
- Consider including disability among the areas in which submissions are invited.
- Put in the conference announcement information about the accommodations you will be able to provide, the accessibility of parking and the locale, and list a contact person for questions of access. This person should have sufficient information and authority to coordinate disability services for the meeting.
- In choosing a venue for the conference, determine the facility’s ability to accommodate accessibility issues. This includes restrooms, meeting areas, coffee and lounge facilities, dining areas, etc. Accessibility should be convenient and, if access is difficult, conference staff should be available to assist. (See below for some more specific questions to ask and recommendations.)
- On the conference pre-registration form, ask what accommodations the participant will require—these might include conference materials in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, or on tape or disk; sign language interpreters; ramps for getting on and off platforms; designated “handicapped” parking; and so on. If a requested service cannot be provided, it is important to call the registrant with the disability as soon as possible to explain the situation and attempt to work out some alternative accommodation.
- Collect as early as possible information about any relevant dietary restrictions of conference participants (vegetarian, vegan, lactose or gluten-intolerant, kosher, halal, allergies, alcohol, etc.).
- Before the conference or meeting, arrange for event staff and volunteers to have an orientation session that deals with how they can best help individuals with disabilities—this is, indeed, an opportunity for general learning made concrete. Staff from the Office of Disability Services at your institution or volunteers with disabilities can help you conduct these orientations. Be sure that you consider the full range of disabilities—visual or hearing impairments, mobility impairments, needs for physical assistance, learning disabilities, and so on—keeping in mind that some disabilities may be hidden. Review the collateral as well as main activities of the meeting and ask how they may all be made accessible to all who attend. Here are some more specific recommendations that should figure in conference planning:

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9 This checklist is a work in progress, and we welcome collaborative contributions to it. The recommendations listed here are not in any particular order and some are intentionally repeated. It includes wording from and information provided by the listed sources. Those with recommendations or suggestions of any kind are invited to contact the APA at info@apaonline.org.
o At conference registration, make someone available who can address questions about accommodations and provide relevant information, and provide the name of someone who will be at the conference to be contacted should further questions or needs arise; ensure that a registration table is available at a height appropriate for attendees using wheelchairs, scooters, and other mobility aids (34” is recommended).

o If food is served during the conference, try to ensure that a range of foods will be available whenever food is served, and that food is properly labeled for dietary restrictions, allergies, etc. For food served by a wait staff, be sure that you have made the wait staff aware of any dietary restrictions, and ask that they be able to respond to questions about the ingredients of the food they are serving.

o If you are planning a reception or buffet-style meal during or after the meeting, ask participants with disabilities if they will need assistance; assign staff to help at breaks or meals.

Some general planning considerations

• When budgeting for meeting or conferences, include accommodations for people with disabilities as a budget item. If you need to get an idea of costs, speak to the Office of Disability Services or others on your campus who have already planned events using accessibility accommodations.

• Consider offering a free or reduced registration rate for a companion assisting an attendee with a disability.

• Consult with the Office of Disability Services or other units to identify individuals who would be willing to volunteer as readers, guides, and personal assistants, or perform other functions related to accommodating individuals with disabilities. Be sure that these volunteers have had training or experience for working with people with disabilities, and include them in any staff orientation.

• Consider putting together a group of volunteers as a Digital Access Facilitation Team (such as the one at the Society for Disability Studies conference), who will be responsible for consistently and comprehensively live-tweeting the entire conference as a way of collaboratively increasing the accessibility of the meeting or conference.

• Consider offering these volunteers a free or reduced rate in recognition of the labor necessary to produce such access.

Please note that there is an ongoing discussion about the use of tweeting and other forms of recording as potentially undermining a safe space for discussing sensitive and often difficult experiences that can arise within contexts engaging topics like race or racialization, sexuality, gender, and disability. Obtain permission from speakers in advance before recording, transcribing, or tweeting, and, if permission is granted, inform audiences at the outset of sessions that presentations and discussions will be live-tweeted. This allows individuals to use their own discretion about what to say or withhold.

• Arrange for good internet connections when needed.

• The internet can be used to provide alternative formats of materials during presentations—for example, allowing people using screen readers or other assistive technologies to follow along with an online version of your displayed material. For remote CART (Communication Access Realtime
Translation), you will need a connection that is reliable and has sufficient bandwidth for transferring audio.

- Have a designated, accessible quiet room, especially if the participants are not staying in the same location as the conference or meeting. This is helpful for a range of disabilities and impairments including, but not limited to, sensory processing disorder, chronic fatigue, and any participant who needs access to a safe and private space for medication, injection, or nursing.

- Where applicable, make sure you make available a list of adaptive and public transportation, including cabs, vans, and city buses, if any, and of volunteers to give people rides to lodging and other event locations.

- Consider providing an accessibility guide, which includes contacts, information for the conference or meeting itself, as well as accessible local eateries and other points of interest. If you do not put together a physical accessibility guide, make sure that your contact person has this information available.

**Planning for possible emergencies**
- In the event of an emergency, are there both auditory and visual alarms?
- Do you have an evacuation plan that addresses the evacuation of persons with disabilities?
- Are trained staff available familiar with these evacuation procedures?

**More specific recommendations**
An inquiry can be made to meeting facilities requesting confirmation of the answers to most of these questions, but some require special attention from conference organizers.

Work together with the campus disability office, who will know how to evaluate the facilities in question. Also, keep a record of various facilities and their accessibility (this could be kept with the disability office or in the office that plans meetings and conferences). When in doubt, walk through the facility with an individual knowledgeable about access issues.

**Venue**
- Is the path to the building accessible?
- Is there a specific entry that is accessible?
- If the main entrance has steps, does it also have a railing?
- If there is not an automatic door opener, can the door be easily opened with one hand?
- Is there an accessible washroom in the building (see also “Washrooms,” below)? Where is it located?
- Is the room/theater accessible? Are the doors wide enough for someone in a wheelchair or scooter to get through?
- Are there seats or spaces allotted for individuals in wheelchairs or those who need to sit close to the front to lip-read, hear, or see?
- Where would someone with a service animal sit?
- Is there someone assigned to guide attendees to the correct accessible location?
• If there are additional events, such as an outside event or social hour, is there seating available for people who cannot stand for long periods of time?

• How easy is the terrain to negotiate? Can a person in a power wheelchair or with crutches easily navigate it?

• Are there any physical dangers to a person with a visual impairment?

• If there is an elevated stage, can those using mobility aids access the stage?

• Are all parts of the venue smoke free and free of strong scents, e.g., fresh paint or floor varnish?

**Signage**

• Are large, clear letters and plain language used on signs directing people to specific areas? Are they free from glare?

• Are event personnel aware of stair-free pathways to the event?

• Are the areas of travel and the display areas adequately lit?

• Is there enough room for those in wheelchairs to safely pass one another? (72” is recommended.)

• If the main entrance isn’t accessible, are there signs directing people to the accessible entrance?

**Washrooms**

• Are the floors slip-resistant and glare-free?

• Are changes in floor level (i.e., stairs, ramps, escalators) marked with a textured edge and color contrasting?

• Is there an accessible washroom? If not, an accessible portable toilet should be made available in an appropriate location.

• Are large, clear letters, understandable pictures/symbols, and Braille used on the signs identifying the accessible washroom(s)?

• Do event personnel know where the accessible washrooms are located?

• Do the doors to the washroom and the stall have clearances that allow a wheelchair to pass through and the stall door to be closed? (37.5” is recommended.)

• Can the stall door be closed and locked with one hand?

• Are grab bars in place on the wall closest to the toilet?

• Can the toilet paper dispenser be easily reached?

• Is there adequate leg clearance under the lavatory counter for those in wheelchairs to wash their hands?

• Will those using wheelchairs or scooters be able to easily reach the paper towel dispensers or hand dryers?

• Are there shelves or other projections that could be hazards for those with a visual disability?

• Do urinals have grab bars installed on each side?
Communications

- Have you arranged for an amplified audio system complete with microphones and stands? Are the stands adjustable?
- Are handouts or other printed materials available in large print, Braille, or electronic format if requested?
- Are podium heights adjustable to meet the needs of different speakers?
- Can microphone heights be adjusted?
- Have you scheduled sufficient breaks during the day?

Access for individuals who are deaf or hearing impaired

- According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, all meetings and conferences must be accessible to individuals with hearing impairments. Therefore, provisions must be made for people who are deaf or have reduced hearing.
- Make sure in advance that assistive listening devices are available for those using hearing aids or needing sound amplification and that you know how to obtain them. Usually, the Office of Disability Services at your institution has access to such equipment and can explain how to use the equipment or connect you with service personnel who will do so. Make sure that service personnel will be on call if the equipment is not functioning during the times of the meeting.
- If requested, the host campus must provide for a sign language or other interpreter for hearing impaired or deaf individuals. You should make sure that such services are available without cost, or that your conference budget plans for this potential expense. Again, the disability services office can provide you with guidance and with names of qualified interpreters should they be required.
- You may also need to provide note-takers for some individuals. This is a legitimate accommodation request and such service can often be provided by the disability services office or by recruiting volunteers at meeting sessions or from the meeting staff who are able to carry out this task.

Access for individuals with visual impairments

- Ask for information on the conference registration form concerning whether the registrant will need for conference materials to be available in large print, audio recording, digital format, or Braille—where the choice of format is determined by the registrant’s preferred mode of communication. Your budget should include this as a possible expense.
- Identify one or more individuals to serve as guides and/or readers for visually impaired attendees, making sure they have access to proper training. The guides should be prepared to take an attendee to a specific workshop, to the washroom, or to lounges and dining areas, and may be asked to stay with the attendee or to return when the activity has been completed, depending on the attendee’s needs. Guides may also be asked to orient an attendee to the meeting facilities so that the attendee can travel about independently. Readers may be asked to read from the printed meeting program, handouts, session evaluation forms, or other print materials, if these have not been made available to the participant in another requested format.
- Someone at the registration desk should be prepared to read items for an attendee or to assist them in filling out evaluations and other forms. If you have more than one workshop, be sure that the
workshop coordinators are prepared to help an attendee with a visual impairment fill out the workshop evaluation form at the end of the session.

- Make a service animal relief area available to attendees.

**Access for individuals with learning and other hidden disabilities**

- Individuals with learning disabilities may also request readers, note-takers, or guides. These requests are legitimate and should be honored.

- If possible, have an area set aside so that individuals with disabilities such as diabetes, heart conditions, asthma, and arthritis can have a place to rest. This rest area may serve multiple purposes, giving an attendee a quiet place to rest, read information, or fill out evaluations.

- You are not responsible for giving an individual medication, but you should know how to get in touch with medical personnel if necessary. Keep in mind that all medical information about individuals must be kept confidential.

- As before, make sure you have a list of both adaptive and public transportation, including cabs, vans, and city buses, if these services are available, or of volunteers able to give people rides to hotels and other event locations.

**Additional resources**

- [APA’s Resources on Diversity and Inclusiveness](#)
- [Digital Access Facilitation Team, Society for Disability Studies](#)
- [Statement from APA members with disabilities on accessibility](#)
- [Recommendations for Making Presentations Accessible](#) (University of Waterloo)
- [How to Make Your Presentations Accessible to All](#) (Web Accessibility Initiative)
- [Accessibility Guidelines for Presentations](#) (Society for Disability Studies)
- [Composing Access](#) (links to sources for making a presentation accessible and conference organizing aimed at access)

- [The Quiet Room by Susan Naomi Bernstein](#) (on the importance of having a quiet, rest space)

- [Sample Accessibility Guide](#) (National Council of Teachers of English)

- Consider browsing the informative and ongoing #AcademicAbleism hashtag on Twitter

- [PhDisabled – What It’s Like Doing Academia with Disability & Chronic Illness](#)