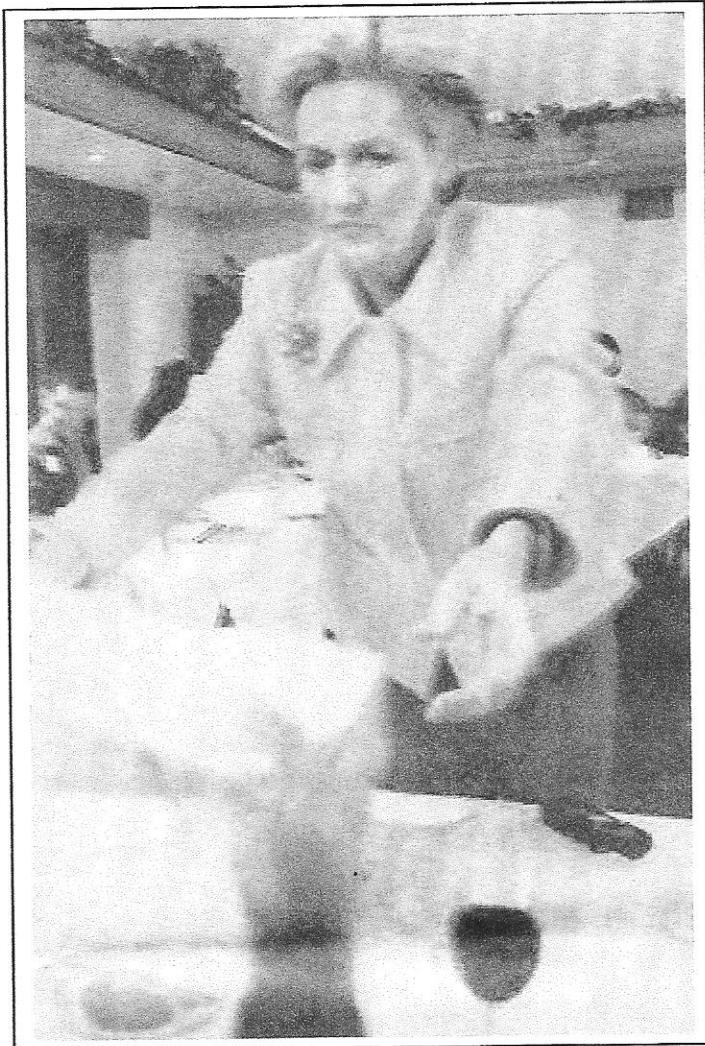

SAN DIEGO UNION

CITY * COUNTY EDITION



How to properly fold a dinner napkin was demonstrated by Protocol consultant Marie-Betts Johnson to UCSD grad students.

Minding their Manners

Class teaches p's and q's to help students land jobs.

By Eleanor Yang
STAFF WRITER

After sitting through an hour-long lesson on business etiquette and networking skills, Kathryn Nguyen was all stressed out.

There were so many things to remember. First impressions are set in the first seven seconds. Have a firm, but not tight, handshake. Take small bites when eating. Ask informed questions. Don't cross your arms. Smile. Look confident.

As a biomedical science graduate student at UC San Diego, Nguyen said she had long been told her research, not her social graces, would get her a job.

But that wasn't the message delivered during the business etiquette class.

In a tight job market, etiquette can make the difference between otherwise similarly qualified candidates, protocol consultant Marie Betts-Johnson said. Johnson is president and founder of the San Diego-based International Protocol Institute of California.

Johnson, who has been teaching etiquette for 19 years, led a recent class of about 25 graduate students at UCSD's Faculty Club. After the hour-long lecture, students networked with four corporate recruiters over wine and cheese.

The popularity of the etiquette workshop, first offered to a sold-out crowd of 35 graduate students last year, has spurred the campus to organize two sessions this year. Besides, the Networking Reception Etiquette session, an Interview Dinner Etiquette workshop was held recently.

The UCSD class highlights a national trend of universities offering students social grace lessons to compete in a competitive job market.

Etiquette experts say they have been giving lessons to college students for the past two decades. What's changed has been the immense increase in the past few years, fueled they say, by a tight job market.

"More universities want to help their students differentiate themselves," said Ann Marie Sabath, a Cincinnati-based protocol expert who will visit 41 universities this year, nearly half of which are new clients.

Johnson shared stories of students who show up for job interviews wearing revealing suits or torn jeans, lace their responses with the slang words "like" and "you know" and give one-word responses to questions.

A forthcoming study by the **National Association of Colleges and Employers found business etiquette among the top three skills lacking among college graduates, along with communication skills and work ethic.** The survey, called Job Outlook for the Class of 2005 was sent to

1,040 companies nationwide.

At the UCSD networking session, students mingled, somewhat hesitantly, through the dimly lit room. Some expertly balanced wine glasses on hors d'oeuvres plates, smiling and asking questions. Others struggled to break into conversations, standing awkwardly on the side.

Throughout the night, students peppered Marie Betts-Johnson with questions.

What do you do if someone asks a question mid-bite? (Finish chewing, then answer.) Where should one put a fork if there's food and a wine glass balanced on the plate already? (Avoid forks.)

As the evening wound down and students offered departing handshakes. Some in the crowd said the practice and lecture were useful.

Grad student Shauna McGillivray said she didn't necessarily feel more confident after the session,

"It's definitely not something I enjoy," she said. "But with practice, I'll feel more comfortable."

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