Interdepartmental Correspondence

Office of the Senior Associate Dean
McCormick School of Engineering & Applied Science
Northwestern University
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Guidelines: Refreshments and Meals for Research and Other Gatherings

A crucial aspect of educating researchers (undergraduate and/or graduate students and post-docs) is to develop and nurture a collaborative, interactive research environment. To this end, from time to time research groups and students gather for seminars, team-building meetings, research reviews, networking, or other informal get-togethers. Often these gatherings involve light refreshments (for instance at a seminar) or an informal lunch (for instance, pizza for students). This policy addresses reimbursement for these informal events with the intent of prudent and appropriate stewardship of University resources.

The applicable University policy is NU Travel, Entertainment & Courtesy policy March 17, 2014 which can be found at http://www.northwestern.edu/financial-operations/policies-procedures/policies/entertainment.pdf. Modest refreshments such as box lunches at department meetings at monthly or quarterly intervals are allowable. Morning meeting refreshments should be kept to a minimum.

Purchase of food on a continual basis for employees or students is unallowable. Food purchased for a regularly scheduled weekly meeting or for daily consumption in an office or classroom is inappropriate use of University funds.

McCormick guidelines specific to gatherings of students and researchers provide the following allowances – all assume that the funds are from discretionary (non-sponsored) source(s).

- Seminars: $1-4 per person for refreshments/light food; $5-10 per person if lunchtime seminar.
- Visitor collaboration, networking, workshops with research group: $1-4 per person for refreshments or $5-10 per person for informal lunch. Such events should occur no more than once or possibly twice per month.

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