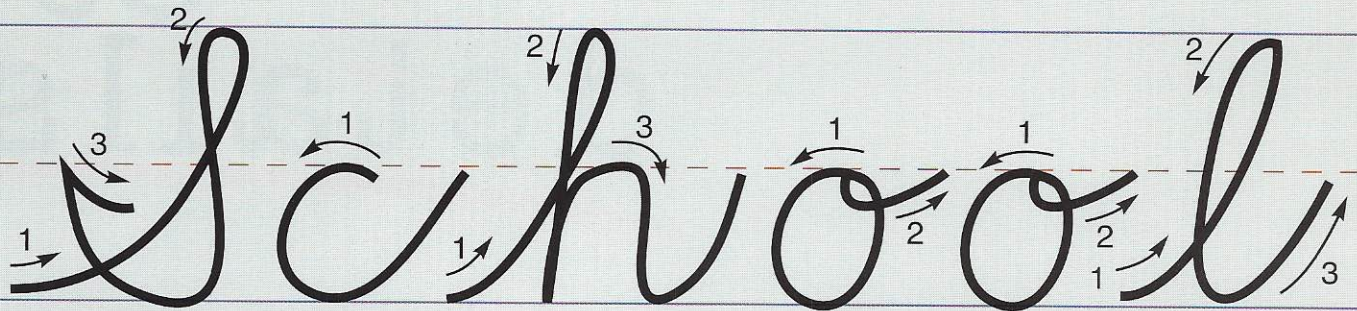


BACK TO



The Advantages of Academic Venues

Finding a venue that offers a distinctive feel, ample meeting space, quality amenities and the latest in technology might just mean returning to the classroom. Today's educational sites have the versatility to please students and professionals alike by providing unique space tailored to groups large or small.

BY KATHERINE BONTRAGER

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1

Notes

MEETING SPACE:

\$250 to \$500 for full-day usage,
\$190 to \$375 for half-day;
multiple booking discounts available.

HOUSING:

prices start at \$45 per person;
available in the summer months only.

UNIVERSITY CENTER

One of the newest educational venues in downtown Chicago is University Center, an impressive 18-story building in the South Loop. In a partnership between Columbia College Chicago, DePaul University and Roosevelt University, University Center is an interesting cross between conference center, retail space and college residence hall.

University Center has more than a dozen meeting spaces open year-round that accommodate groups of 10 to 100. Most rooms are fully equipped with high-speed Internet, DVD players, screens that lower from the ceiling and white boards that save notes for sending via e-mail or printing. In-house catering is supplied by Aramark, and options range from continental breakfasts to elaborate buffets.

During summer months, University Center opens its student housing as full-service overnight accommodations. From apartments to suite-style units, all rooms are fully furnished with satellite television service and high-speed Internet access. Lounge areas, all with complete kitchenettes, are available on every floor for additional meeting space or social use. An outdoor garden terrace offers incredible city views, and the adjoining Great Room, with its large stone fireplace and plush seating, can be used in tandem for warm-weather functions. A game room, food court, fitness center and multimedia room equipped with a large screen and comfortable seating are other highlights.

Robert Navarro, director of housing services for the center, says the unique combination of meeting space, housing and dining all in one building makes the new multimillion dollar space a stand-out among Chicago's other venues. "Other venues can offer one or two of these services, but not all three," he says. "We offer affordable rates, unique housing accommodations and a variety of on-site amenities in the heart of downtown Chicago."

Steps from the Harold Washington Library Center, Marshall Field's on State, the theater district and El stops to take you to Rush Street, Wrigley Field, O'Hare International and Midway Airports, University Center serves as a major hub for Chicago-based gatherings. >>





2

“It’s just a natural place to hold the event.”
 —Dr. Nate Kohn”

ILLINI UNION

The stately Illini Union, located in the center of the University of Illinois campus, is the heart of activity at the Urbana-Champaign school. A colonial-style building, the Illini Union boasts the distinction and charm of a bygone era. “The Union is an excellent way to show guests both the past and the present of University of Illinois,” says Clare Rahm, associate director at the Illini Union. “We’ve stayed true to our early roots in our physical appearance but provide the modern amenities one would expect of a conference facility.”

This ambience creates a distinct brand of hospitality for University affiliates. With spaces for parties of 40 to 150, the latest audio-visual equipment and quality catering provided by the University, the Illini Union covers an array of meeting needs. In addition, it also houses an art gallery, billiards room, bowling lanes, food court and lounges. Seventy-two guest rooms and two VIP suites are available year-round and are designed in a classic colonial style with modern updates: cable TV, voice mail, fax services, dry cleaning and more. VIP suites also have high-speed Internet access, a large sitting room and views of the University of Illinois main quad.

Elaine Wolff is the program director in the division of conferences and institutes in the office of continuing education at the University of Illinois, and she works with a variety of groups that hold events at the Union. “Groups want to meet at the Illini Union because it is at the heart of the campus,” Wolff says.

Dr. Nate Kohn is an associate professor at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. He is also the festival director and co-founder of Roger Ebert’s Overlooked Film Festival, which held its sixth annual gathering at the Illini Union.

“All festival guests stay at the Illini Union and we have four panel discussions on festival topics in the Union’s meeting rooms. Informal discussions, led by Toronto Film Festival director Dusty Cohl, always take place over breakfast in the Union courtyard,” Dr. Kohn says.

On average 500 visitors rely on the Union’s expertise, he adds. The Union is an obvious choice for the festival, which is sponsored by the College of Communications at the University of Illinois.

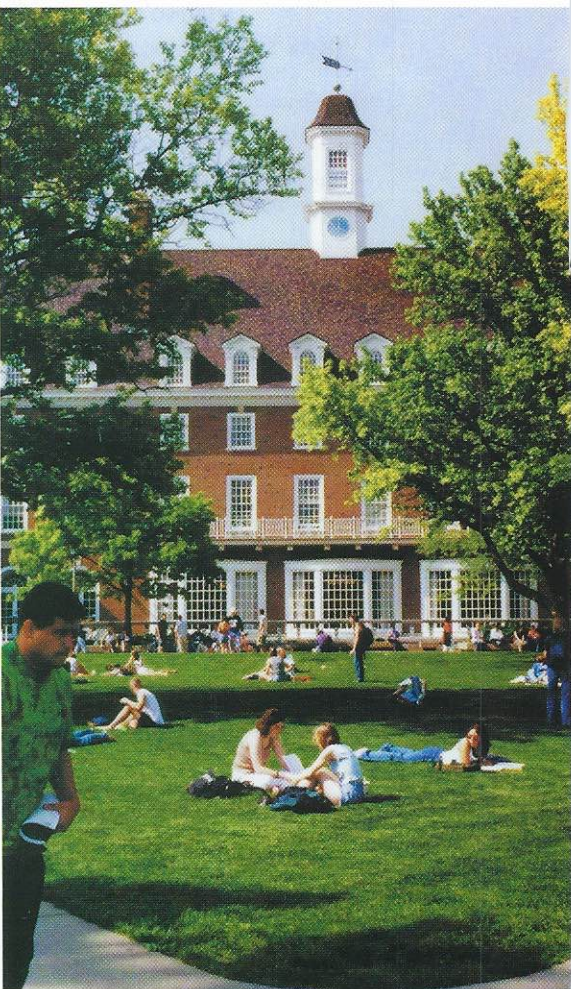
“It’s right in the center of campus ... so it’s very convenient, and of course Roger Ebert always stays there when he comes to town,” Dr. Kohn says. “It’s just a natural place to hold the event.”

Notes

MEETING SPACE:
 \$45 for standard rooms,
 \$110 to \$330 for specialty rooms,
 lounges and large meeting rooms;
 for use by University affiliates only.

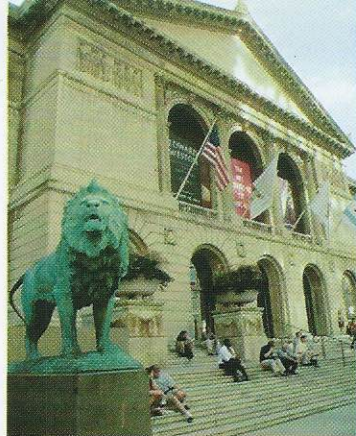
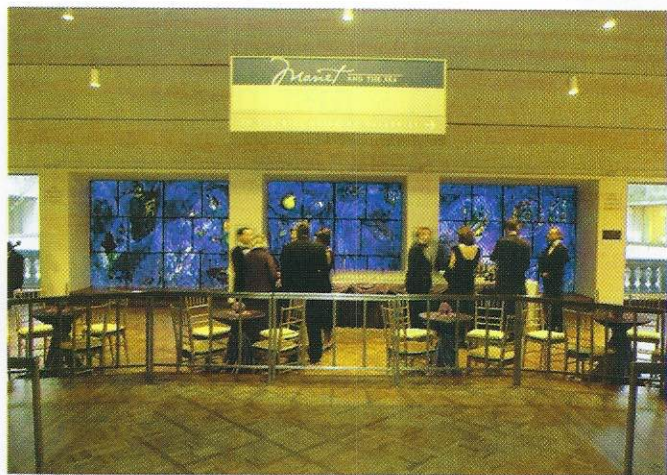
Above: The Illini Union offers 72 guest rooms and two VIP suites year-round.

Below: Students lounge in front of the Illini Union.



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Notes

CHICAGO STOCK EXCHANGE TRADING ROOM:

\$3,000 Fridays and Saturdays, \$2,000 remainder of the week.

McKINLOCK COURT GARDEN:

\$3,000 Fridays and Saturdays, \$2,000 remainder of the week.

Clockwise from above: Guests mingle at Chagall's America Windows; visitors rest on the steps of The Art Institute of Chicago; The Art Institute's Millennium Park Room; The Louis Sullivan Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room.



3

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO & BON APPÉTIT

The Art Institute of Chicago is home to some of the world's most coveted artwork, and is an ideal setting for an impressive gathering. The Art Institute's flexible meeting space coupled with exclusive caterer, Bon Appétit, makes for an unequalled opportunity for an unforgettable occasion.

"The Art Institute of Chicago speaks for itself," says John Kvedaras, director of catering at Bon Appétit. "I am constantly in awe of the treasures around us. We concentrate on creating artwork on plates, as our food has to support the artwork."

There are understandably some restrictions—food and beverages are only allowed in areas where artwork is protected. But Kvedaras says that the company works creatively to combine space needs with easy access to galleries and exhibitions. Lecturers can even be arranged to give guided tours so guests can truly experience the artwork.

"We can offer food and beverage in a few spaces where art is protected, such as near Chagall's America Windows and the adjacent Gunsaulus Hall, which displays arms and armor as well as European decorative arts," Kvedaras says. "Special exhibitions are held just steps away in the Rice building."

The Art Institute has a variety of meeting spaces to handle most needs. "Our largest room is the Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room, with a seating capacity of 300 on

the main floor plus seating for an additional 50 in the viewing gallery. The Trading Room can be combined with the adjacent Chicago Gallery for a reception capacity of 600 guests," Kvedaras says. The richly landscaped McKinlock Court Garden is also available to accommodate 200 seated guests or 300 for receptions.

Marilyn Kahn works for a large investment management firm based in Los Angeles that regularly holds a Chicago meeting to present its top 100 representatives with a week of education and information on its funds. For their closing event, the company held a dinner party for 120 at the Art Institute.

"The first thing that drew our attention was the Trading Room," Kahn says. "Since we are a financial services firm, we thought the connection between the Stock Exchange and our business would be highlighted in the room." The Rembrandt exhibit was being shown at the time, which added an extra element of interest for the company.

"The service and food were tremendous and we received a number of positive comments on how wonderfully the evening turned out," she says. "One of the gentlemen at my table was amazed to find himself in such a grand place and couldn't stop commenting on how lucky he was to be at such a spectacular event." ▶▶

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: OPPOSITE, THE ILLINI UNION; THIS PAGE, THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO



The Ballroom at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

“It’s just perfect with the gold detailing, ornate design and beautiful staircase...”

—Katie O’Reilly

THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO & THE GENE SISSEL FILM CENTER

Evoking images of the opulent roaring ’20s, the Ballroom at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago hosts dinners, receptions, weddings, lectures and symposia, and other special events. The award-winning space boasts Baroque-style balconies, 26-foot ceilings and a performance stage.

“The events held at the ballroom range from cocktail receptions to a seated dinner with dancing, as well as elaborate weddings to poetry readings,” says Katie O’Reilly, director of special events.

The ballroom accommodates 300 for a seated dinner or 600 guests for a stand-up soiree. A professional kitchen is on-site for use by one of the nine caterers on the ballroom’s exclusive catering list.

“Weddings are our biggest business, and the venue calls for that,” says O’Reilly. “It’s just perfect with the gold detailing, ornate design and beautiful staircase that brides can either come up or come down to their waiting guests.” The sweeping staircase is reminiscent of the grand entrance at the Paris Opera House. O’Reilly’s sister-in-law, Karen Doyle, relied on this elegant setting for her wedding.

“We looked at a number of different places near, or on, Michigan Avenue,” Doyle says. “We wanted something that stood out because my family had never been to Chicago.”

4

Notes

THE BALLROOM:

\$1,500 to \$4,500 for three to six hours; tables and chairs included in the rental fee.




PHOTO COURTESY OF: (TOP) SHANE, THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO; (THIS PAGE) GENE SISKEL FILM CENTER

Doyle went as far as changing her wedding date to take advantage of an open spot in the venue's schedule. The staff advised her on lighting, acoustics and a table layout that ensured a smooth flow of her 300 guests. In particular, Doyle enjoyed having a cocktail hour on the balcony overlooking the tables and terrazzo dance floor.

The School of the Art Institute is also home to the Gene Siskel Film Center, which shows films in the evening hours but opens its doors during the day to host luncheons, presentations, screenings and parties. Located in the heart of Chicago's bustling theatre district, the Film Center bills itself as the Loop's contemporary alternative for special events and features two state-of-the-art theaters and a gallery/café. Theater 1 has stadium seating for 197 while Theater 2 accommodates 61 guests. The café/gallery overlooks the city and has a reception capacity of 200 or can seat 100. Outside caterers are accepted to set up a lunch, breakfast or small buffet; the Film Center offers a list of suggested caterers as it doesn't have a full-size kitchen.

The Film Center possesses some of the latest technology in film and video and the finest acoustics found in a theatrical setting. "The audio-visual capabilities are great and almost any laptop can be brought in and hooked to our system for a PowerPoint or Internet presentation projected onto our large screens," says Rebecca Burgess, assistant director of finance and operations at the Film Center.

ABC Television Network relied on the Gene Siskel Film Center this year to announce the 2004-2005 ABC Television Network Primetime schedule for national advertising clients and agency executives. "We chose the Gene Siskel Film Center because of the accommodating, professional personnel and their comfortable environment," says Edward J. Wollock, SVP, general manager of network sales, central division. "This is our third year with the Film Center and our experience is always gratifying and engaging." 

Katherine Bontrager is a freelance writer from Chicago, Ill.



Notes

THEATER 1: \$1,200 during the week,
\$1,500 on weekends.

THEATER 2: \$1,000 during the week,
\$1,200 on weekends.

CAFÉ/GALLERY: \$500 during the week,
\$750 on weekends for three hours.

Above: Theater 1 accommodates 197 guests.

Left: The café/gallery at the Gene Siskel Film Center.



IN TOUCH

UNIVERSITY CENTER
525 South State Street
Chicago, IL 60605
312.588.0955

ILLINI UNION
1401 W. Green Street
Urbana, IL 61801
217.333.0691

BON APPÉTIT
AT THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
111 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603
312.443.3912

THE BALLROOM AT THE SCHOOL
OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
112 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603
312.345.3506

THE GENE SISKEL FILM CENTER AT THE
SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
164 North State Street
Chicago, IL 60601
312.846.2073