

# Excluded at the Table: Navigating Halal Food Accessibility as a Muslim PhD Student at Academic Conferences

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# Importance of Academic Conferences

Conferences are key opportunities for networking, collaboration, and professional development.

- Specially for graduate students



Communal meals are integral to these experiences.



How often do you think about the food options at conferences when you attend?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

- Have you ever heard the term “halal food”
  - Related Ethnic identity?



Muslims



# Halal Food

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Krosher  
Nonalcohol  
NotPorkZabiha  
VeganVegetarian  
Chicken

# What does Halal mean?



- Halal = "Permissible" in Arabic
- Prohibitions: pork, alcohol, and meat not prepared according to specific rules.
- ✓ Fruits and vegetables are halal.
- ✓ Fishes are halal.

# When I ask if they have any halal options?

What is that?

Don't you eat chicken?

You are vegetarian, right?

Can you make an exception this time?

# The Exclusion at the Table



Halal Food Accessibility



Personal reflection on common challenges.



# Most Common Scenario

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What food options do they generally have ?

- Non-veg, Vegan, Allergen-free, Vegetarian (e.g., Veg Sandwich, Garden salad)
- Single Vegetarian option
- Sometimes ingredients are not clearly mentioned.
- What do I do?
  - Go out for food, miss the next presentation
  - Starve



How many  
conferences I  
attended in the past  
few years

Around 15

In the registration  
form, how many of  
them asked for food  
accommodation

Every one of them  
but not a single of  
them mentioned  
Halal food  
option/choices

How many  
conferences had halal  
options/recognize  
Muslim students?

ONLY 2 (AAAL 2024 &  
GURT 2025)

# What a Paradox!

Have you ever seen halal options mentioned in pre-conference materials?

How conference materials emphasize inclusivity but rarely mention halal.

A subtle form of exclusion.

# Reflection on a Recent Conference

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- In the registration form, there was no mention of Halal food option (of course).
- No suitable food tag
- Auto considered for Vegetarian
- The vegetarian option was Chef's Choice (could only figure out what it is once it's served}
- Had to leave the table in the middle of meal every single day
- Ordered food online (took too long to reach) / Had to starve
  - Extra Financial Burden







# Chef's Choice



# How do we feel?



Excluded

Not Considered

Not Valued

Not  
Accommodated

# Why It Matters- Beyond the Meal

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**Meals as a Space for Connection**

Meals at conferences are about much more than eating; they are about community and networking.

# What can you do?

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Accommodate



# Solutions for Inclusivity

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## Creating Inclusive Conferences

- Include Halal Options in Meal Planning
- Educate Event Staff
- Label Food Ingredients Clearly
- Collaborate with Diverse Communities

# Takeaways

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- Halal food accessibility is also about inclusion and respect.
- Fulfilling dietary needs leads to stronger connections and a more inclusive academic space.

**Everyone, regardless of their dietary or cultural background should have a seat at the table**

Thank you!





Questions?