Spring 2018

A hospitality themed event: A journey through Camelot

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A Hospitality Themed Event: A Journey Through Camelot

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An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Business
Hart School of Hospitality Management

James Madison University

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by Jane L. Aronds

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Hospitality Management, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at James Madison University Festival Student and Conference Center on February 11, 2018 and at the James Madison University Honors College Symposium on April 18, 2018.
A Hospitality Themed Event:
A Journey Through Camelot

By Jane Aronds
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Acknowledgements

I want to thank the Hart School of Hospitality Management for the opportunity to plan and execute a spring 2018 themed event. I specifically appreciated the guidance of Theresa Lind and Dr. Michael O’Fallon during the planning and execution process, and for assistance with my honors project. I would also like to thank Jared Diener for making it possible for me to combine my hospitality management capstone project and honors college capstone project. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Gilpatrick Hornsby for serving as my honors liaison.
Abstract

This paper discusses my Themed Event Project, Camelot, which also served as my hospitality management capstone project. With a team of four other hospitality management students, I planned and executed a creative themed event surrounding the overarching theme of Medieval times and the Royal court of Camelot. Decorations, food, and entertainment for the event were based on Medieval culture to create a royal castle experience for guests to dine like kings and queens for the evening. This paper will outline all details of the event such as floor diagrams, decorations, menu items and entertainment. It will also outline analyses of all event aspects from the post-event perspective. Overall, my experience working on this event exposed me to all aspects of event management from the planning stage to actual execution months later. This paper will serve as a summary of the event as well as a representation of what I have learned through this hands-on learning opportunity in the Hart School of Hospitality Management and the JMU Honors College.
Introduction

When I first entered the Bachelors of Science in hospitality management major as a freshman in 2014, I expected to plan and execute a themed event during my senior year as it was a requirement for all hospitality management students at the time. However, during my sophomore year in 2015, my major became a part of the Hart School of Hospitality, Sport and Recreation Management. With this curriculum change came a change in the themed event requirement. Instead of having each student execute a themed event (totaling sixteen events per semester), the Hart School now required students to propose their events to the Hart school faculty with only four teams ultimately being selected to actually execute their events. This change to the curriculum further inspired me to work hard in my courses so that I could one day be a part of one of the four groups selected to execute my own themed event.

During the fall of 2017, I worked with a group of four other hospitality management students to plan a themed event in the hope that we would be one of the four teams selected to execute an event during the spring of 2018. After brainstorming, we selected Medieval times and the royal court of Camelot. As a team, it was our mission to create an experience for guests to feel as though they were stepping back in time and entering the court of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere. With authentic table décor, reception and dining decorations, a performance by court jesters, a medieval trumpet fanfare, a harpist performance, and medieval table etiquette, we wanted our guests to feel as though they stepped out of the 21st century and back into the 12th.

The planning process of the themed event was a tremendous learning opportunity. Prior to taking this introduction to event planning course, I had never planned an event. The only experience in event planning or event management that I had been exposed to was when I worked at two special events during my externship with Aramark in spring 2016. During the
planning of the event, I found it eye opening to see all the small details that encompass an event. For example, I learned how to create a budget, create an invitation, develop a menu, write a production schedule, fill out an event BEO, and more. I also learned how to create a website. In the planning stages of the event, we were tasked to create a website for our guests to view important event details. Each person in my group had never made a website before, so this was an additional learning opportunity for us.

Initially, my group planned to have our event in the Festival Grand Ballroom in the evening with a guest count of 85. Therefore, our production schedule, reception and dining diagrams, and budget accounted for these details. When our event was actually selected to be executed, our location changed to the Festival Highlands room, our event was selected to be in the early afternoon, and our guest count increased to 105. We had to alter all details that we had planned and alter our budget to account for more supplies to be ordered and more food to be ordered with Aramark.

The planning of the event taught me a great amount about team work and how people with differing opinions work together. Our group dynamic did not flow as well as I would have liked during the fall semester. Each of our schedules did not line up properly, meaning that we all only met on Sunday nights once a week, and then worked individually in the meantime. This created some tension and conflict where ideas were not shared properly between all group members. In addition, we suffered communication issues where several team members did not communicate as well as others with each member of the group. This led to various ideas of how to do certain parts of the event that differed between group members. Although we suffered some conflict in the fall, we were still able to plan a successful event and be selected to execute our event after our presentation to the Hart School faculty.
Unfortunately, we had two team members drop out of our themed event group upon recognition that we had been selected. At first, this brought even more stress to the remaining three team members (Danielle, Jess, and me). Although we had suffered miscommunication in the fall with the two members that had dropped out, the three of us were still skeptical of how well our team dynamic would function with the addition of two new members to an event that they had not planned with us. What I soon discovered, though, was that the best time in my themed event journey was when we hired Tori and Megan to be a part of our group. They brought great ideas and suggestions to our event which is what I felt had been lacking during fall semester. They added a positive morale boost among team members. Despite the fact that they did not plan our event with us in the fall, their motivation for our event made it seem as though they had been a part of our team the whole time.

My team and I were selected to execute our themed event on Sunday February 11, 2018 from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Festival Highlands room. We applied the skills and knowledge learned from the classroom to this first real-world application of a project in our major. We took the event from the early planning stages, through fine tuning event details, to the actual execution.

Our event involved numerous unique aspects ranging from authentic decorations, entertainment, and food which gave us more versatility and a creative slate to develop ideas on how to bring Camelot to life. The event had both a reception portion and a dining portion. The reception was held at the beginning of our event and was designed to look and feel like a medieval festival in the outside courtyard of a castle. For decorations, stone wallpaper covered the walls outside the Festival Highlands Ballroom. There was also a drawbridge constructed from wood printed wallpaper that was hung on the main dining room door with blue water on the
ground to represent a moat to further create a scene for guests to feel they were standing outside of a castle. There was then a fountain with blue tissue paper in the center of the reception to replicate a fountain with water. There were several cocktail tables spread throughout the event draped in long white linens and tied off with thick burlap bows. Atop these tables were gold wine bottles with bouquets of white roses and yellow flowers, as well as ivy and candles placed delicately around the bottles. Colorful flags were also hung across the ceiling of the reception to add to the medieval festival ambience. As guests mingled in the reception, medieval music was playing in the background. In terms of reception entertainment, there was an interactive medieval ring toss game which we built and titled *Ye Olde Ring Toss*. In addition, there were two photo booths; one photo booth incorporated medieval props such as a jester hat, king and queen crowns, a sword and shield, and the Duke Dog mascot. The other photo booth incorporated a paper mache rock and sword to replicate King Arthur’s *Sword in the Stone* myth.

For reception hors d'oeuvres, there were “Sword in the Stone” cheese balls of mozzarella cheese balls drizzled in pesto and balsamic glaze and pierced with a sword toothpick. The second hors d'oeuvre was a mini beef pie delicately drizzled in gravy. Drinks (“libations”) for the reception consisted of “Hot Mulled Apple Cider” which was a warm apple cider, served out of a warm antique drink dispenser and “Merlin’s Roberdavy Punch” which was sparkling grape juice served out of a large punch bowl. These were poured from staff and served in golden goblets to guests.

To signal the transition from reception to dining, several trumpeters from the JMU Marching Royal Dukes trilled a medieval fanfare to signify a royal entrance into the inside of the ballroom which was decorated to resemble the inside of the castle. Managers from our team reached up to pull the drawbridge down from the main door to create a unique walkway for
guests to enter the dining room. Inside the dining room was a wall of stained glass paintings, portraits of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, a map of Camelot, medieval table layouts, paper torches, shields, and swords lining each wall. For food, there were four courses served consisting of rosemary rolls and honey butter, “earthapple” potato soup, large roasted turkey legs served on a bed of herb roasted carrots and mushrooms, and warm apple cobbler with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. In addition to dining room décor and food, aspects of entertainment included a harpist and a performance from JMU improvisation group The Weird Cousins as court jesters.

At the price of $37.50 per ticket, guests were able to enjoy all event aspects mentioned previously. Overall, the event had a total of 105 guests who payed $37.50 each which is how we obtained the revenue for the event. After reviewing the guest feedback and satisfaction survey, we determined that 83% of our guests said they were exceptionally satisfied with the overall dining service and 80% were exceptionally satisfied with the overall reception service for the price of the tickets.
Pre-Event Materials

I. Production Schedule:

Below is the production schedule that my team and I developed for the event. This detailed timeline served as an important element to the execution of our event as it outlined specific and timely tasks for front and Back of House managers and supervisors and student staff to follow closely to ensure that the event would run smoothly.

_Camelot_ Production Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>DETAILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:15 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast with Theresa at Mr. J’s Bagels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 AM</td>
<td>Arrive at Festival Highlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:15 AM-7:30 AM</td>
<td>Staff arrival, check in and welcome. Staff should place their belongings in a conference room, and eat the provided breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:40 AM</td>
<td>Staff tour of the building, meet the managers and supervisors/intros. We will convey our overall theme and goals for the day during this part of the day- HANDOUTS GIVEN TO STAFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08:05 AM</td>
<td>Reception, dining and BOH staff will be divided into their assigned groups and go to the designated area. Each aspect to be set up will be briefly explained to staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15 AM</td>
<td>All staff will meet in the dining room for Servsafe training. Managers and supervisors will go over the menu, service style, dietary restrictions/allergens to be aware of, how to properly serve, and sanitation reminders, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45 AM</td>
<td>Staff break into assigned groups (reception, dining, BOH) and begin set up/ prep! Managers and Supervisors will be there to assist and answer and prep questions. Staff members should look at diagrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>Remind specified staff of special duties for reception and dining. (For reception- coat check duties, check in duties, and server and bar tender duties.--Dining; water refills, coffee attendee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15 AM</td>
<td>Break for staff to change into proper attire. They can also grab water or snacks at this time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 AM</td>
<td>When staff return from their break, a quick run through of how they day should go will be explained once more for clarification. Staff heads to their respective locations after.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 AM</td>
<td>LOOK THROUGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:50 AM</td>
<td>Guests begin to arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:05 PM</td>
<td>Servers begin to pass hors d’oeuvres to guests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15 PM</td>
<td>Make sure beverages are still full- PUT BREAD ON TABLES AND WATER AND COFFEE STATION SET UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:28 PM-12:30 PM</td>
<td>Trumpeters walk from entrance to main castle door entrance. SOMEONE will exclaim a welcome. “Here he, here he, ……..” Castle doors will fall over moat. Trumpeters play welcoming fanfare to signal for guests to head into the castle (dining room).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:35 PM</td>
<td>Harpist begins to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:35 PM</td>
<td>first course served round 1/ Head server will greet and welcome table guests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:38 PM</td>
<td>First course served round 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:52 PM</td>
<td>Clearing Round 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:52 PM</td>
<td>Clearing round 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:55 PM</td>
<td>Main course served round 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:58 PM</td>
<td>Main course served round 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:05 PM</td>
<td>Jesters put on a comedy skit and entertain guests with jokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:27 PM</td>
<td>Main Course Cleared round 1/ harpist begins again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 PM</td>
<td>Main course cleared round 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:32 PM</td>
<td>head server goes out to each table and lets guests know that there will be coffee, and to help themselves if they want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:35 PM</td>
<td>Dessert served round 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:38 PM</td>
<td>Dessert served round 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:50 PM</td>
<td>Bring staff in and speeches/thank yous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>Event ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CLEAN UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>Estimated time of finished clean up and dismissal. Staff may not leave until a supervisor signs them out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Diagrams

Below are the diagrams for our dining room (A), and dining table layout (B). To create the dining room diagram, we trained in class on how to use the SocialTables event planning software to effectively create floor plans with accurate room sizes, placement of event items, and square footage. Ultimately, we used the AllSeated diagram software to create the diagram.

A. Dining Diagram

B. Dining Table Layout
III. Décor

Prior to actual execution of our event, we brainstormed how we envisioned important decorations at our event to look like to bring a medieval ambience to the Festival Highlands room.

Reception and Dining Preliminary Décor:

In the reception, there will be paper resembling stone to be hung on walls, an elaborately decorated castle door, a stone fountain, ivy draping and medieval banners hanging across the ceiling.

In the dining area, there will be wall decor of shields, torches, and a stained glass Gobo projection.

On stage, there will be a decorated throne draped in ivy and gossamer with two seats.
There will be six large medieval shields/banners hanging from the ceiling, and there will also be black chair covers on each seat with shields and crests tied to the back.

For table set up/layout, each table will have 1 fork, 1 soup spoon, 1 dessert spoon, 1 knife, and 1 maroon napkin on top of golden chargers. There will also be a wine glass at each table setting filled with water.
*Each table centerpiece will be comprised of candelabras, black velvet runners, black linen and will be lightly draped with ivy down the center of each table.*
IV. Food and Beverage Summary

Our event offered hors d'oeuvres, drinks, and entrées to have guests feel as though they were dining at a medieval banquet. We gave each menu item a unique name to fit our medieval theme. Below is a copy of the menu for the event as well as a description of the items served.

Reception Menu:

*Sword in the Stone*: A delectable combination of cheeses formed into balls with sword toothpicks pierced through the center to resemble the infamous King Arthur’s Sword in the Stone

*Meat Pie*: Warm mini beef pies served in a flaky pie crust seasoned with thyme, chopped onions, and bay leaf.

Beverage Menu:

*Hot Mulled Apple Cider*: A sweet and fresh taste of apples in a warm cider.
Merlin’s Roberdavy Punch: A tart and fruity sparkling grape juice served in a goblet for medieval flare.

Dinner Menu:

Earthapple Soup: Chunky potato soup in a warm vegetable broth.

Rosemary Rolls: Doughy rolls seasoned with rosemary and served with honey butter.

Traditional Turkey: Turkey leg done-to-a-turn and fit for a king, served with roasted carrots and mushrooms and seasoned with thyme.

Vegetarian: Roasted carrots and mushrooms seasoned with thyme, served on a bed of rice, with a side of green beans.

Apple Cobbler: Nesh apple cobbler served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.
**Day of Event Synopsis**

This section serves as a snapshot of the day of the event before the analysis of event details in the following section “Post Event Materials.”

On our production schedule, we had allotted for staff to arrive between 7:15 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. However, when the managers and supervisors first arrived to Festival at 7:00 a.m., we realized that the building was still locked because the building manager had not arrived to unlock the main door. The managers and supervisors were able to enter the Festival building through the loading dock. However, the locked main entrance posed a problem for our staff because they were unable to enter Festival to find our check in for the event. In addition, numerous staff members were running late because of the rainy weather conditions.

Also, because the building manager had not arrived to open the building, the lights were turned off in the Festival drum and the conference rooms for storage were locked. The managers and supervisors called the building manager to see if he could turn on the lights and unlock the conference room, but he did not answer the telephone. This posed another problem because we were unable to give students a tour of the event space in the dark. In addition, students were unable to put their work clothes and personal belongings in the conference room because it was locked. As a result, this put us slightly behind on our production schedule and started our day off on a stressful note.

Thankfully after about thirty minutes, the building manager arrived and turned on the lights in the Festival drum and also unlocked the conference room. Although this was a stressful situation for managers and supervisors, we all made sure to remain positive. After the building manager resolved the issues we were able to implement our production schedule.
After the employee breakfast, managers and supervisors took the staff on a tour of the event space. After this, student staff were divided up between their respective job duties: reception, dining, and Back of House. Each staff member was then trained on their designated job tasks. Analysis and details of staff training will be outlined in greater detail later in this paper.

After training, staff members began to set up the reception and dining room area based on their assigned responsibilities. Before long, it was time for the staff members to eat a quick lunch while the managers and supervisors did final inspections of the reception area and dining room. During this time, the entertainment acts arrived (the trumpet players, the harpist, and the Weird Cousins improvisation group). Supervisors helped the entertainment acts set up while the managers made sure that everything was in place before guests arrived.

By 12 p.m., guests began to arrive at the reception. More details on the overall event and analysis of the event will be provided later in this paper.
Below are some photos of the execution of the event:

**Reception set up and décor:**
Dining set up and décor:
Post Event Materials

I. Analysis of Service Style

To plan the serving at our event, we used what we learned in previous courses to determine which serving style would best fit the theme of our event. We ultimately decided to use the serving style “hand service” which we referred to as a “modified hand service.” Each student staff member who was a server was assigned two guests to serve. Each student entered the dining room carrying two plates and served the guest on the left first when the head server nodded. From the server’s left side, they placed the plate down with their left hand. The server then moved to the guest on the right and transferred the left plate to their right hand. The server then placed the second plate down with their right hand. These were the instructions on the serving style that was provided to students in their training packets on the day of the event. Our serving style was a modified hand service as we had a unique layout of rectangle tables in a star shape outlining a stage in the middle of the dining room. For clearing, student staff servers (similar to serving) started with their leftmost guest again and picked up the plate with their right hand after the head server nodded. They then moved to the rightmost guest and transferred the plate to their left hand and carried the plates out of the dining room into the Back of House kitchen area.

As managers, we used what we called “table cards” and “food tags” as resources to help our servers figure out if their guests had dietary restrictions. The table cards were color coordinated (pink, purple, green, red or blue) based on the color of the table the card and server they were associated with. The table cards had simple sketches of the tables and where each guest would be seated at the table. The table cards and food tags made it easier for student staff, supervisors, and managers to visualize any dietary restrictions of specific guests. These food tags
and table cards were a way for servers to know who they were serving and what meal each guest would receive. Below is an example of table cards and food tags.

![Table Card Example]

The first issue that arose during the serving of our first course was confusion surrounding which potato soup cups were for vegetarian guests and which potato soup cups were for the other guests. After careful analysis, my team and I realized that the dining managers should have communicated better with Danielle, the Back of House manager, as to how servers should retrieve the dietary restriction soup cups. Looking back, managers should have set a specific Back of House table to be solely for dietary restrictions, so that any servers could freely go to this table to retrieve the special dish that they needed for their particular guests.

The second issue that arose after the first course was the realization that our event had lost some student staff. We initially planned for floater staff to refill drinks. Floater staff are student staff who are assigned to work at the event on any small tasks that are not previously assigned such as refilling drink cups for guests. However, after losing several staff members, dining managers had to improvise by sending several servers into the dining room to refill drinks.
between courses. This created some tension as these student staff then had to refill drinks quickly before having to run back in line to serve the next course of food.

After analyzing the entrée round, it was evident that servers appeared to be more comfortable and confident with their serving teams.

Between the entrée round and dessert round, servers were given a break. During this break, several of the servers filled in for floater staff and went to refill water glasses in the dining room. After analyzing the dessert round, we observed that servers were most confident serving this round because they had practiced during serving the appetizer and entrée rounds. What also helped during this round was finally setting up a specific table for dietary restriction dessert plates. This allowed for servers to find the food plates that they needed much more easily. At this time, managers also sent head servers into the dining room to inform their tables about the coffee and tea station that was set up in the front of the room.

After reviewing and analyzing the service style of the event, my team and I thought following hand service procedures worked well. We felt by selecting this serving style it created a feeling for guests of being served at a royal banquet inside a castle. In addition, as a team we saw that it worked well that the servers waited to place their first plate until the head server gave them a head nod. While to us it seemed as though there was chaos with the dietary restriction table and chaos with getting servers ready in their serving teams to go into the dining room, guest feedback shows that many guests did not notice any chaos at all. The guest experience was the most important thing to us and we are happy that our serving style and serving teams paid off.
II. Analysis of Production Schedule:

Our Production schedule served as a tool to keep managers, supervisors, and student staff on track throughout the event. The production schedule, as outlined above on page 10, helped managers and supervisors visualize which staff and when staff needed to be in certain places, when entertainment needed to be set up, when food should be ready, and when each event component needed to start and end. Upon analysis of the production schedule, my team and I believe that we mostly followed our production schedule. However, after looking back, we also realize that in several instances, the timing of event aspects was slightly behind schedule, while some event aspects were actually ahead of schedule. As managers, we knew that we did not have to follow the production schedule exactly, and that we should use it more to reference in order to stay on track. When we did stray from the timing of the production schedule in several instances, as managers we made sure that everything eventually balanced out and that the timing caught up.

After analyzing the production schedule further, my team and I would do several things differently. The first thing that we may have changed would have been to assign more specific tasks to supervisors. We believe that more specific guidelines on the production schedule for supervisors could have benefitted the timing of event aspects better and could have prevented us straying from the timeline. In addition, we believe that if we had used bullet points in the production schedule instead of short paragraphs, it may have been easier to reference and read the production schedule more quickly when it was hung on the wall and when we were running around the event.
III. Analysis of Reception Training:

When we assigned job tasks to student staff, we divided up the students between their assigned tasks: reception and dining. This meant that any dining staff were assigned to set up the dining room and any reception staff were assigned to set up the reception area. This created organization for all members of our staff. We also felt that this would also give staff a sense of power in their position and a sense of pride in what they set up. To start the training for both dining and reception, managers gave each staff member an index card that was color-coded to indicate their specific job assignments: blue for dining and green for reception. These index cards also outlined detailed job descriptions for each staff member.

After handing out notecards, managers ensured that all staff members were aware of and had access to the various copies of the training packets that we had printed and spread out throughout the room. These packets had more detailed information on decoration types, where certain decorations needed to go, and what all other items were for in both dining and reception. My team and I created these packets because we wanted the staff to feel as though they had some power in their jobs and in set up by giving them tools to be successful in their jobs.

After distributing index cards and explaining the importance of the training packets, my team and I led staff on a tour of the reception and dining areas so that they could further see how we envisioned our event to be and how we wanted each decoration to be set up. My team and I also told the staff that if they had any other ideas for how to set up our event, they should let us know so that they could, again, feel empowered in their jobs.

The first staff members who took us up on our offer to make suggestions were staff members who suggested using our extra blue tissue paper as “water” in the fountain in the reception area. Staff members also eventually gave us the suggestion of draping extra ivy on the
stone wallpaper by the drawbridge in reception, as well as wrapping gossamer and ivy around the columns. These suggestions were important for us to follow because we wanted our staff to feel that they were making an impact on our event.

As a team we also trained our servers on how to properly serve hors d’oeuvres in reception. My team and I created a staff training PowerPoint to do this. In this PowerPoint we showed staff members pictures of the passed hors d’oeuvres. In addition, prior to the start of reception, we instructed servers and bussers in the back of the house on the proper way to hold the trays, when to return to the kitchen for refills on the hors d’oeuvres, how to check for and clean up leftover trash in the reception area, and reiterated the details of each dish’s ingredients and all dietary restrictions/allergens. Our staff was able to successfully serve hors d’oeuvres throughout the reception to make sure that all guests had a chance to try all food items and that the food items were served in a timely manner.

To analyze reception training further, we reviewed the staff feedback. When reviewing the staff feedback, 90% of reception staff who completed the survey said that they felt confident in their job duties and responsibilities 10 minutes before guests arrived, with only 2 students saying otherwise, with one saying, “I thought the details of the jobs we had both before and during the event were laid out and explained well”, with another saying that the set up was “very well organized and planned.” These statistics further demonstrate the success of our reception training which prepared staff to do their jobs well.

While we believe that we did a competent job with reception training based on staff feedback, there were several things that could be improved. For example, we could have assigned more staff to certain jobs and set up the room better. On the day of the event, we lost a staff member who was assigned to be the second bartender in reception due to illness. As a
result, we were left with only one bartender to serve two different drinks to 105 guests. Looking back, we should have assigned a dining staff member to work both reception and dining so that we could have had another bartender serve drinks as well.

Something else that we could have improved was the location of the bar. We initially thought that setting up the drink station by the entrance would allow for guests to select a drink as soon as they entered reception. Because the drink station was extremely close to the entrance, the long line of guests waiting for drinks caused a traffic jam for other guests trying to enter the reception. We should have put the bar in the back of the reception which would have diverted traffic and would have also allowed for guests to walk through the entire reception to get a drink.
IV. Analysis of Dining Training

As mentioned in section I, the serving style used at the event was a modified hand service style. Each student staff member who was a server was assigned two guests to serve. Each student entered the dining room carrying two plates and served the guest on the left first when the head server nodded. From the server’s left side, they placed the plate down with their left hand. The server then moved to the guest on the right and transferred the left plate to their right hand. The server then placed the second plate down with their right hand. These were the instructions on the serving style that was provided to students in their training packets on the day of the event. Our serving style was a modified hand service as we had a unique layout of rectangle tables in a star shape outlining a stage in the middle of the dining room. For clearing, student staff servers (similar to serving) started with their leftmost guest again and picked up the plate with their right hand after the head server nodded. They then moved to the rightmost guest and transferred the plate to their left hand and carried the plates out of the dining room into the Back of House kitchen area.

To train student staff members on how to serve, we presented a PowerPoint on the serving style and common Servsafe protocol. The serving style instructions were also available in printed copies of student training handbooks that were spread throughout the setup of the event. Each student staff server was also provided with a notecard/task card with the colors of the tables that they would be serving. In addition, we had seating charts with the colors of the tables and seat numbers for students to reference and for managers and supervisors to follow. After the PowerPoint presentation, we organized the student staff in their serving teams. We then rehearsed the transition between their walk from the reception area into the dining room. We walked them through the path to their tables, demonstrated how to serve guests, and how to exit.
the dining room properly. We repeated this rehearsal three times to ensure that all student staff were comfortable with serving and knowledgeable of their assigned job duties. Overall, the PowerPoint presentation, seating charts, task cards, and repetition of serving rehearsal were all beneficial in making the dining training run smoothly and efficiently. Dining training did not take as long as anticipated because the preparation for it made it run smoothly. According to the student staff survey, 5 students rated the overall dining training as “perfection,” 12 students rated the overall dining training as “quite good,” 4 students rated the overall dining training as “good,” and 1 student rated the overall dining training as “poor.” Through this quantitative evidence, it shows that the majority of students working in the dining room viewed our serving training as good. One student commented on the survey positively and said, “We went through service training at least 3 times through and they made sure we were all clear.” Another student said, “I think the training of how we were suppose to serve worked well. By having us practice where/how to walk and then what to do at the tables helped us a lot in feeling comfortable. Service style was outlined well and worked smoothly.” These two comments further demonstrate that the way that students were trained to serve in the dining room was effective.

While dining training was mostly effective, there were still several things that did not work as well as expected. The main issue that occurred on the day of the event was that some student servers were not prepared properly to serve dietary restrictions. Although the managers attempted to make sure that servers knew if they had a dietary restriction, we still observed some confusion among the servers on where to locate the dietary restriction meals and which dietary restrictions they were serving. There were also several occasions where student servers were not provided with the special meal plates until right as they were about to enter the dining room, leading to a rushed and chaotic transition. Another main issue that occurred on the day of the
event was a staffing issue. At the last minute, we had three student staff members drop out of our event due to not showing up for work and others due to illness. As a result, we were understaffed with servers to serve our large guest count. We had to have a supervisor fill in as a server, and we also put our floater staff on serving duty. This limited the amount of staff who could go into the dining room to refill water glasses. When we had to send servers into the dining room to refill water glasses, they had to rush so that they could make it back in time to retrieve their food and get back in line with their serving team to serve the next course. Lastly, one main issue presented from the student survey was that there was still one student who said they were uncomfortable with serving after our training, even though the majority of students said that they were comfortable and confident in their serving duties. This one student comment said, “Not sure we were trained well. Not all servers waited for head waiters nod. Not sure everyone always knew what was happening.” Although this was only one student, it still shows that this was something that should have been addressed after the training prior to the start of the event.

Something that we could do next time would be to make sure that all student servers were aware of guests with dietary restrictions, and what that specific dietary restriction was. We could have also put the dietary restrictions on their task cards and on the tables where the food was put out for the servers. We should have also made sure that all student staff were comfortable with the serving style since our serving style was a unique and modified hand service. We did ask our serving teams if they were comfortable with the serving training, but if we had made absolute sure, it could have prevented one student from writing about their discomfort on the survey. Lastly, we could have made a contingency plan for a scenario if student staff were to drop out from our event suddenly. We had planned our dining and serving teams with the perfect number of student servers who were assigned to our event. While what happened with the staffing issue
was inevitable, we could have possibly prepared a backup plan so we would not have been so frazzled on the day of the event trying to fix it.
V. Entertainment Analysis

Our event encompassed numerous aspects of reception entertainment. In reception, we had two separate photo booth stations, a ring toss game, a drawbridge, a visit from the Duke Dog mascot, and Marching Royal Dukes trumpet players. The first photo booth was a photo opportunity with a paper-mache rock to resemble King Arthur’s Sword in the Stone with a forest backdrop. The second photo booth utilized various medieval props such as king and queen crowns, a shield, a sword, a jester hat and the Duke Dog mascot. What worked well for the photo booths is that it was evident that all guests enjoyed being able to take photos to remember their time at our medieval themed event. On our guest satisfaction surveys, for example, we received positive feedback on them. One comment said, “I liked the stations for pictures as it gave people a chance to mingle. Having the Duke Dog attend was a great idea!” This further shows that this guest liked the photo booth stations. What worked well for the ring toss game was that it provided another unique form of entertainment for guests to play while they mingled in reception. We did not receive any feedback on this game in the survey, but through observation at the event, guests were playing the game and enjoying it. What worked well for the Marching Royal Dukes trumpet player performance was that it was a creative way to signal the transition between reception and dining for guests. There were two comments left on our guest satisfaction survey that said that these two guests enjoyed the music from the trumpet players.

While most aspects of our reception entertainment went well, there were still several aspects that could have been improved. The first aspect of reception entertainment that could have been improved was the execution of the drawbridge on the dining room door. As a unique way for guests to enter the dining room, we constructed a drawbridge out of wooden wallpaper and PVC pipe. In theory, the drawbridge should have been pulled down for guests to walk over
to enter the dining room. However, upon execution, the main doors became caught on the paper and as a result the doors were unable to be opened. Our supervisory team had to rip the bottom of the drawbridge off in front of guests to open the dining room doors. What could have improved this situation would have been to practice executing the drawbridge transition with the supervisory team. As a manager team, we had practiced it, but we did not rehearse it with the supervisors who we had pull the drawbridge down.

The second aspect of reception entertainment that could have been improved was the placement of photo booth stations in relation to the drink station. We had the drink station at the main entrance to the reception so that guests could enjoy a beverage upon arrival. However, we also had our Sword in the Stone photo booth next to the drink station. As a result, the entrance to the reception was more crowded than originally expected. There was a comment left on the guest satisfaction survey that said, “It was a bit crowded and hard to get around, especially with the Sword in the Stone pictures and refreshments next to the entrance.” If we had moved the photo booth to a different area in the reception, it could have prevented the crowds by the drink station. Overall, despite the several aspects that could have been improved, most guests seemed to enjoy the entertainment. On the guest satisfaction survey, 68.57% of guests gave our reception entertainment an exceptional remarkable rating, and 28.57% gave us an enjoyable rating. 0% of guests gave us a disappointing rating.

In dining, we also had numerous aspects of entertainment. There was a video projected on the screen playing clips from Medieval themed movies, a harpist, and a performance from the JMU improvisation group, The Weird Cousins. The improvisation group interacted with the audience and had guests laughing and participating in their show. They also successfully worked with the medieval theme. There were several guest comments left on the guest satisfaction
survey about how guests enjoyed the improvisation group. For example, one guest wrote, “The comedy group was very entertaining.” The harpist’s live performance also set a period tone. On the guest survey, several comments were also left by guests about how much they enjoyed the live harp music. One guest wrote, for example, “I loved the atmosphere especially the decorations, trumpet and harp music.”

While many aspects of the dining entertainment worked well, there were several aspects that could have been improved upon. The improvisation group, for example, ran over their allotted time slot. Upon booking the event, I, as entertainment manager, hired them for a minimum of 15 minutes and a maximum of 25 minutes. However, their performance ran for 27 minutes. As the entertainment manager, I had to discreetly signal for them to finish their set to allow for clearing of the dinner plates and serving of dessert according to the set schedule. However, in my dual role as both dining manager and entertainment manager, I also understood the importance of keeping to the allotted schedule. The second aspect of dining entertainment that needed improvement was the arrival of the harpist. We planned for the harpist to arrive at 11:30 a.m. However, she had a problem with her car and did not arrive until after 12 p.m. She had to wheel her large harp around the guests in the reception portion of our event and through the Back of House which was crowded with student staff and managers.
VI. Analysis of Back of House Training

Danielle was the Back of House manager for our event. Back of House means “behind the scenes” of the event, for example in the food preparation area and kitchen. After analyzing the Back of House procedures, we observed several things that worked well to help the flow of the event. The first thing that Danielle told us worked well was pre-scooping of the vanilla ice cream for the dessert before the event so that the individual ice cream scoops could be taken off of the tray and placed on top of each apple cobbler dessert. The second thing that she told us worked well was having each of menu item and the ingredients and allergens displayed on poster boards. This served as a visual tool for servers and Back of House staff to reference in the kitchen area. In addition, there was a detailed timeline written on poster board and displayed in the Back of House which contained crucial times that each food item needed to be plated and served to ensure that food was served to guests in a timely manner. According to Danielle, what also worked was good communication. Danielle told us that by communicating with the Back of House team on the morning of the event during set up created trust and respect among team members. This action allowed for there to be good teamwork throughout the entire day and allow for other parts of the event to be successful as well.

While there were numerous things that worked well for the Back of House team, there were several things that could have been improved. According to Danielle, in addition to some confusion over dietary restrictions, another problem was an inability to have all satellite kitchen tables closer to the entrance and exit door for the Back of House area leading into the reception. Five satellite tables had to be placed in the back room by the Aramark dish supplies. This was an unforeseen problem because we initially thought that all tables would be able to fit in the space closest to the reception door. The placement of the tables was farther away than anticipated, and
it made Back of House staff fall slightly behind schedule as they had to walk to the tables that were far away to retrieve the food. Something else that could have been improved was the hot box containing the potato soup, rosemary rolls, and appetizers. With everything in this hotbox at once, it was difficult to get food items out. Although the warm appetizers needed to be served first, they were placed farther back in the hot box. The hot box also posed a problem when the Back of House staff were trying to obtain the soup container to pour it into the bowls while also trying to take out the rolls without spilling any food.

After analyzing the Back of House process with Danielle, we now realize that we could have improved on several things to make the Back of House process run more smoothly. First, we should have set aside a specific table for all dietary restriction food items so that servers would not have been as confused on where to locate those meals. Another thing that could have worked better was developing more specific tasks for Back of House staff members. While directions were given to them verbally, we believe that they would have benefitted by having more specific written guidelines. Having more specific job tasks could have prevented any confusion that was expressed among student staff members. What also could have been beneficial would have been more walk throughs with the Back of House staff to demonstrate each course in greater detail. For example, we could have ensured further training such as a walk through of each individual step of when to bring food out to the tables for the first course, all the way to bringing out the round of the dessert course. Similarly to the walk through with the dining staff, we believe that a similar walk through with the Back of House staff would have allowed them to feel more confident in their job duties. In terms of statistics for Back of House training, 53.85% of students ranked the Back of House training as “perfection” while 46.15% ranked the Back of House training as “quite good.” In terms of feedback and comments on the
survey, several students remarked on the strong organization and communication in the Back of House and the productivity expressed by all. These statistics demonstrate that while there were several mishaps in the Back of House, the training overall was relatively effective in preparing staff to feel confident in their duties.
VII. Summary of Guest Feedback

At our event, our team wanted to make sure our guests were top priority. As a team, we wanted to create a memorable experience for them as they dined in the royal court of Camelot. To gauge guest feedback, we sent a survey to all guests who attended our event. We had 35 guests fill out our survey. Upon analysis of this feedback, we received both positive and negative feedback which gave us useful feedback on how we could have improved aspects of our event.

On the guest feedback survey, we observed that the majority of comments related to the overall ambience and set up of our event. For example, one guest wrote, “I liked the stations for pictures as it gave people a chance to mingle.” Another guest wrote, “Having the Duke Dog attend was a great idea! I loved the atmosphere especially the decorations, trumpet and harp music.” A third guest wrote, “I loved all the decorations that went into the event. I truly did not recognize where we were and the fact the entrance was hidden to the dining room was also very exciting.” We wanted guests to feel as though they had stepped back in time to the medieval era and the Royal court of Camelot. Therefore, these commented reiterated that the overall effect of our event was successful in achieving what we intended for it to do.

This survey also provided numerous comments regarding the food served during reception. 60% of guests who filled out the survey said the first hors d'oeuvre served was exceptional, 34.29% said that the first hors d’oeuvre was enjoyable 2.86% said that they were disappointed by it, and 2.86% said that they were unable to assess. 55.88% of guests said that the second hors d’oeuvre served was exceptional, 38.24% said it was enjoyable, and 2.86% said that they were unable to assess. 80% of guests who filled out the survey said reception decor was exceptional. In terms of the reception beverages, 62.86% of guests who filled out the survey said
that they were exceptional, 31.43% said that they were enjoyable, 2.86% said that they were disappointed, and 2.86% said that they were unable to assess.

After analyzing the guest feedback on reception décor, we determined that the majority of guests liked it. 80% of guests who filled out the survey said that they thought the reception décor was exceptional and 20% said that they thought the reception décor was enjoyable. In terms of reception service, 77.14% of guests said that they found the service exceptional, 20% found the service enjoyable, and 2.86% found the service disappointing. For overall feedback on reception, the survey said that 80% of guests found the reception exceptional and 20% found the reception enjoyable/ met their standard of quality.

After reviewing reception feedback from guests, we brainstormed ways that we could have improved the reception. The first thing that we believe could have been improved was the location of the drink station/bar. We set up the bar by the main entrance to reception so that guests could grab a drink upon arrival into the event. While this seemed like a good idea at the time, during the event managers and supervisors observed that there was overcrowding and traffic by the main entrance to the event which was caused by the long line at the drink station. In addition, there was only one staff member working the drink station which further slowed down the line. One guest wrote on the survey, for example, “[It was] a bit chaotic at the drink area with people not sure who was next to get a drink. There should have been more people serving drinks at reception. You could also have had the servers pre-pour some of the cold drinks, and having them ready, another server could hand them out.” Another guest wrote, “There was only one person on the drink station and so there was a very long line for beverages. She was constantly having to stop service to refill the ‘cauldron.’ There needed to be at least one more person working there.” To fix this overcrowding problem and to reduce the line that was forming, we
should have placed another student staff member at the drink station so that the line could have been helped quicker. Besides this, there were no other major issues or comments about our event.

In regards to dining, a majority of our guests said that they liked the overall ambience of the dining room. 68.57% of guests found the dining room ambience to be exceptional and 31.43% found it to be enjoyable. In terms of dining room food, it appears that guests enjoyed our second course more (the potato soup) in comparison to the first course (the rosemary rolls and honey butter). 62.86% of guests found the second course exceptional while 60% found the first course exceptional. In terms of the main entrée (the turkey leg with mushrooms and carrots), 51.43% found this course to be exceptional, 42.86% found it to be enjoyable, and 2.86% found it to be disappointing. It was evident from the data on this feedback that the guests’ favorite dish was dessert with 80% of guests finding the dessert to be exceptional. In comments, guests also commented that they liked the turkey leg because it fit the medieval theme. One guest wrote, “The main course was delicious! The turkey was delicious and lots of fun to eat! Excellent carrots and mushrooms, too!” Another guest wrote, “The turkey leg…was so unexpected! Also fit the theme beautifully.” While these were examples of the positive feedback over our main course, we also did receive several negative comments from guests on it. Several guests stated that the turkey leg was their least favorite because of its large size. One guest wrote, for example, “The entree was good but really difficult to eat in a sophisticated manner. Also just way too much meat.” Another guest wrote, “The turkey leg was totally awesome and delicious and a great touch to the medieval theme, but it was kind of hard to eat.”

After analyzing the guest feedback on dining room décor, we determined that the majority of guests liked it. 62.86% of guests found dining room décor to be exceptional and 37.14% of guests found it to be enjoyable. In terms of dining service, 82.86% of guests said that
they found the service exceptional, 14.29% found the service enjoyable, and 2.86% found the service disappointing. For overall feedback on dining, the survey said that 82.86% of guests found the dining experience exceptional and 17.14% found it enjoyable/met their standard of quality. In addition, 68.57% of guests said that they received a good value for the money they spent on the event, 22.86% found the value for their money to be enjoyable, 5.71% found it to be disappointing, and 2.86% were not able to assess.

Based on the feedback provided to us on this survey, we believe that our guests were satisfied overall with how the dining service went. Several comments were left on the survey about food courses in dining, and about decorations that did not stay in place. For example, one guest commented, “Decor was beautiful and well thought of but it got in the way as a safety aspect.” This comment was in reference to several pieces of gossamer that fell off the ceiling during the dining portion of the event due to failure to securely fasten the strands together. We understand that this was an unforeseen safety issue. In terms of food, one guest commented, “The honey butter at the table was a delicious item but since we quickly ran out of rolls, it might have been good to serve smaller rolls, but double the portion in the basket at the table. The extra touches like honey butter were noticed by all, but especially with no additional starch dish on the entrée plate, extra rolls might have helped for those who were very hungry.”
VIII. Summary of Staff Feedback

The staff at our event was comprised of Hospitality Management students from Hospitality Management courses HM 212: Hospitality Prowess and HM 317: Introduction to Event Management. We had 38 staff members assigned to work at our event. It is a requirement for these students to work at one themed event during the semester so that they can visualize and get ideas of how to plan their own themed events in the future. My team and I found the feedback provided to us by student staff to be helpful and constructive and it gave us insight to ways that we could have improved as managers.

The first survey question asked whether a warm welcome between managers and staff occurred or not. 86.21% of staff said that this occurred, 10.34% said that this did not occur, and 3.45% said that they could not assess. The second survey question asked whether managers were ready for staff at the time of staff arrival. 96.55% of students said that this occurred and 3.45% said that this did not occur. Other questions on this survey asked about the use of nametags on managers and staff, the use of flipcharts and job responsibility poster boards, the overall work ambience, the employee breakfast, the employee orientation, and the introduction to managers and supervisors. Upon analysis, the lowest ranking category was the category regarding the use of posters and flipcharts detailing job responsibilities. When we assigned tasks to students, we wrote each staff member’s responsibilities on a notecard for them to carry with them throughout the event. We also printed several copies of specific staff training packets. However, we did not have actual posters of job responsibilities set up. We thought that our task notecards would be sufficient enough, but we now also think that we should have also created larger signs with each job responsibility for students to reference as well.
For staff feedback, staff were also asked to review their training in the reception and dining areas. After reviewing this feedback, only one student reported that they had some issues with their training. Overall, though, most students ranked their training as perfection or quite good. 90% of staff members also reported that they felt very confident in their job responsibilities before guests arrived, 5% (one student) said that they did not feel confident, and 5% could not assess. In addition, 95% of students reported that they felt confident in their knowledge of the food being served after reviewing the food allergens, Servsafe protocol and menu for the event during training.

This feedback helped us visualize what worked and did not work well for our staff. What worked well was the reception and coat check procedures. For example, in reception, one staff member wrote that the reception and coat check went very well. They said, “The coat check was very organized and the entire reception was set up on schedule without rushing.” Another student wrote, “Having three people working reception and a couple people working coat check worked really well.” This feedback from staff was encouraging because it showed what worked well for staff at the event.

While numerous things worked well at the event, other things could have been improved. For example, prior to receiving this feedback, we were unaware that one student did not feel confident in their job responsibilities. In addition, several students reported that they felt that supervisors and managers did not make an effort to know their names. As a team, this feedback was enlightening. Something else that did not work as well as planned was the drink station. As mentioned in previous sections of this paper, we received comments on the drink station causing traffic in the reception area, and that the bar was understaffed with only one staff member serving drinks. Again, this was an oversight and something we could have fixed prior to the
event by moving the drink station to the back of the reception, as well as having one or two more staff members work the bar to serve drinks and to lessen the line of guests waiting for drinks. What also could have been improved was the check-in process. Several staff members reported that they struggled with finding the names of guests because the “dragon scale” takeaways were organized by the guests’ assigned tables instead of in alphabetical order. If we could have changed the check-in procedure, we may have placed the “dragon scale” takeaways in alphabetical order to make it easier for staff to locate the guest names upon check-in.

In terms of dining, 22.73% of staff ranked their training as perfection, 54.55% ranked it as quite good, 18.18% ranked it as good, and 4.55% ranked it as very poor. As managers, it was useful to see this feedback so that we could assess what worked well and what did not work well for staff in the dining training. On the guest feedback survey, one staff member wrote, “I think the training of how we were supposed to serve worked well. By having us practice where/how to walk and then what to do at the tables helped us a lot in feeling comfortable.” Another staff member wrote, “Running through the routine of taking the food out and clearing their plates was really helpful for someone in HM 212, I think the training of how we were suppose to serve worked well.” Another staff member wrote, “We went through service training at least 3 times through and they made sure we were all clear.” This feedback is encouraging because it shows that a large amount of the dining staff felt that their training was sufficient to set them up for success at the event.

While the overall dining training went well, there were several things that could have been improved. First, there was one student who ranked our dining training as poor. This was eye-opening because we were unaware that one student felt uncomfortable with their job responsibilities prior to the actual event. We made sure to ask each staff member before the event
if they had any questions or concerns. However, it was not until we reviewed the feedback that we saw that one staff member still felt unprepared to do their job. In addition, there were several comments on our staff feedback survey that the actual lining up in serving teams to enter the dining room was not as smooth as it was during the dress rehearsal. One staff member wrote that they felt that “the flow of the servers entering the room when serving was a little unorganized because lines had to cross through each other” and that “the entrance where everyone bring food in are not well organized.” This feedback, again, showed us something that we had not been conscious of on the day of the actual event. With this feedback, we can better understand how to manage staff in the future.

In terms of Back of House, 53.85% of staff ranked their training as perfection and 46.15% ranked their training as quite good. In addition, 78.57% of staff said that the emphasis on proper sanitation was done completely, meaning that they were confident in this. This was useful information to know because it is important to follow proper sanitation procedures when working in the kitchen and in the Back of House prep area. In addition, 78.57% of staff members noted that they felt confident in their job responsibilities after training and 71.43% of staff members found that posters and flipcharts of food items were also beneficial to their time as Back of House staff. After reviewing several staff comments, one student wrote, “I thought the operation as a whole went very well. [The manager] was very clear with what she wanted and engaged us in a friendly, productive manner” and that “all courses went out on time so I think our timing and having the time line as reference was very helpful, everyone worked well together.” This positive comment further demonstrates how well the Back of House was run on the day of the event.
While there was mostly positive feedback shared on the Back of House procedures, there was one comment that explained how it was slightly difficult to communicate with other supervisors. The comment said, “I felt like there was too many comments/orders from the managers & supervisors, not corroborating to give orders to all of the BOH. I enjoyed working with both the BOH manager and BOH supervisor but it was hard to receive instructions from other supervisors and managers.” Looking back on this as a team, we realized that there was a tremendous amount of pressure felt by all of us to get the plates out of the Back of House prep area quickly so that we could stay on schedule. This was something that we should have been more conscious of, and we should not have let our own stress be felt by our staff members.

Managing the HM 212 and HM 317 students was a unique learning opportunity.
IX. Detailed Analysis of Budgeted versus Actual costs

At the price of $37.50 per ticket and a total of 105 paying guests, we had $3,937.50 of revenue for our event. This section will outline items that we spent the most money on, as well as analysis on where we believe we could have spent more wisely.

Reception

For reception and dining, we were able to use several team members’ artistic talents to create the paper mache Sword in the Stone prop and the “Dragon Scale” favors of Pop Rocks candy in miniature glass bottles. Because we saved money by making some of the decorations, we were able spend more on our largest decoration expense, stone wallpaper for the walls of the reception room. Overall, the cost of stone wallpaper to cover the walls in the reception area totaled $141.03. This was the largest expense in reception, but it was necessary to purchase in order to cover the walls of reception which would further create the effect of the castle courtyard scene.

As a team, we believed that the Sword in the Stone prop could have been made in a less expensive, more efficient way. The stone was constructed out of donated chicken wire covered in newspaper and then spray painted to resemble textured stone. The stone textured spray paint was not only expensive, but was very thin during applications, and required numerous coats. This spray paint cost significantly more than regular gray spray paint. The stone spray paint cost us a total of $25.98, while the regular grey spray paint cost us a total of $7.92. If we had realized this expense initially, we would have purchased regular cans of gray spray paint for the first few coats. After this, we would have been able to use one can of the more expensive stone textured paint.
Something else that we believe could have been improved was our table favor for guests to take home. We created “dragon scales” by putting colored Pop Rocks candy in miniature mason jars. We then attached corresponding guest name tags with twine to the jars. When we first ordered the jars online, we anticipated that they would be somewhat larger. However, when they arrived and were smaller than expected, we discovered that it was a tedious task to use a funnel to put the candy inside each jar. Also, we initially planned to coordinate the colors of each jar with the corresponding colored tables that each guest was assigned to: red, green, purple, pink, and blue. However, when we purchased the Pop Rocks in 5 different flavors, the Pop Rocks were not the colors that the flavors led us to believe. For example, two different flavors of Pop Rocks appeared red even though we thought one would have been pink. In addition, some of the Pop Rocks had melted in the packaging, making them unusable. As a result, we had to improvise with the Pop Rocks that we had.

**Back of House**

Overall, the total cost for food at our event provided by Aramark totaled $2,256.11. The largest expenses in Back of House were the turkey leg entrees and sword toothpicks for the sword in the stone cheese ball hors d'oeuvres. As a team, we realized at our food tasting of the event food prior to the event that the turkey leg entrée was larger than we had anticipated. The turkey leg entrees were food items that had to be special ordered by Aramark because they are not usually served at Aramark events and it is not a typical protein that is usually requested by guests. Although we realized that the turkey legs were very large at our food tasting, we decided to keep the turkey legs as they were to be served at the event in order to gauge a “wow” factor from guests. After analyzing the feedback on the guest survey, we observed that many guests commented that the turkey leg was too large to eat for the main course. This was something that
we had discussed prior to the event. In theory, we could have used a different protein such as chicken on our menu to have eliminated this negative feedback, as well as to bring our cost down. However, we decided to keep the turkey leg for the main entrée to go along with our theme and to surprise guests.

Our second largest expense for Back of House was sword toothpicks for our “sword in the stone” cheese ball hors d'oeuvre. These sword toothpicks had to be ordered relatively far in advance and were more expensive than regular toothpicks. The sword toothpicks, for example, cost us $8.75, where regular toothpicks usually cost much less. Using normal toothpicks could have saved us money, but we felt that using sword toothpicks would reinforce the “Sword in the Stone” theme.

**Dining**

In dining, our two largest expenses were printing and candelabras. The total cost of printing for our event was $166.33. We printed menu cards, posters of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, a map of Camelot, and scrolls. These printed pieces were important purchases to further bring our Camelot experience to life. However, we ended up paying to have too many menus printed. At the end of the event, we had a stack of extra menus that we originally thought we would need as backup. If we had planned better, we could have saved money and not printed as many menus. However, at the time that we printed, we did not have our final guest count. If we had budgeted better for printing, as well, we could have used the money saved by not printing as many menus to have signs for the event professionally printed.

We also created various signs for our event such as the “Welcome to Camelot” sign, the “Libations” sign, and the “Sword in the Stone” photo booth sign by using poster board and
handwriting them. If we had budgeted our money better, we could have had these signs professionally printed at the copy center to bring a neater feel to the signs displayed at the event.

The candelabras were also expensive centerpieces. The total cost for the candelabras was $161.00. In theory, we could have used a different centerpiece for each table that would have been cheaper. However, because we had enough money in our budget, we decided to use the more expensive candelabras because they reflected our castle theme well. Lastly, we used gossamer draped across the ceiling to decorate the dining room. We used white gossamer from the HM closet so this expense was free. However, we used Scotch tape to fasten the pieces of gossamer together to make them longer across the ceiling. Halfway during the dining portion, the gossamer started to break apart from each other and fall off the ceiling. We should have budgeted for something sturdier than scotch tape to fasten the pieces of gossamer together, such as safety pins or staples. This would have prevented the gossamer from falling off the ceiling onto guest tables.
Reflection

In the personal reflection below, I will discuss my experience with this themed event, what I plan to take with me to my future career, and my key takeaways and advice from my experience working on this event.

I. Personal Reflection

When I first found out that I had been selected to execute my themed event, I was excited and anxious all at the same time. I was ready to use what I had learned throughout my four years as a Hospitality Management student to apply towards putting on a successful themed event. I had heard from upperclassmen peers about the stress, frustrations, but also rewarding aspects that would come with the themed event. I knew that there would need to be a lot of time and effort put into this event. Although it sounded daunting, I went into the challenge with a positive attitude. However, when we found out that two of our team members, Alexis and Jessi, would not be able to execute with us in the spring due to personal conflicts, I was unsure how successful our team could be by adding two new people to our event. What we soon learned, though, was that Tori and Megan were great additions to our team. They brought great ideas to the table as well as powerful and strong work ethics which positively benefitted our event. They also contributed to a positive morale boost among team members which further enhanced our team dynamic. Tori was also able to bring her budgeting skills to our group and Megan also brought her creative ideas and suggestions for event decorations and setup.

After returning to JMU from winter break, our event preparations and project came to life. I spent days, hours, and many nights with my group working on crafts, drafting documents,
working on the budget, shopping for event items, or just discussing the event progress. This project brought us together as teammates, classmates, and friends.

What really brought the event together for me was seeing the actual execution take place. I was able to see all our decorations, food items, and entertainment come to life from our papers to fruition. During the event reception I mingled with guests and stopped to take in all that our team of five had created. I also observed the guests enjoying themselves. The hospitality industry is a people industry and it brought me great satisfaction to see my guests enjoying the event that I had created for them. It was also satisfying to see all of our hard work pay off. It was evident that the hours we had spent planning and crafting had been successful. In addition, it brought great pride to receive praise from family, friends, and other guests at the end of the event about how they enjoyed attending the event and seeing what we had put together.

Overall for me, the themed event process and experience was a unique and amazing learning opportunity. I had never planned an event before. Through this process I was able to see all of the small components and details that are necessary to create an event. Developing a budget, menu, production schedule and more are all things that I learned to do in this process which will be useful to know in my future hospitality career. This process also taught me the value of team work. My team and I functioned very well together. Throughout this semester, we did not have any major conflicts. We communicated well with each other, took each idea into consideration, and respected each other. We all brought our own ideas to the table and combined them to create our event.

This process also taught me a great amount about myself and how I work with others. One of the largest take-aways for me from this event is realizing that not everything will be perfect. In most situations, I believe that I am a perfectionist and I always envision things
working out 100% like they should. However, what I learned through this process is that you have to roll with the punches sometimes. If something does not look like what you had envisioned, if something is sold out before you can buy it, or even if something goes wrong on the day of the event, it is important to remain calm and to improvise with what you have. Creativity and improvisation were important factors that we had to use throughout the themed event process. Another takeaway for me is how to work with a team. Between having a different group in the fall than we had in the spring, I noticed a positive change with the group dynamic. However, I now understand more how to work with bad groups and good groups. This is something that I can bring with me to my future in the Marriott Voyage program where I will have to work with the other Voyagers on projects on a weekly basis. In addition, I have learned that I benefit strongly from working with others. I used to think that I liked to work individually on projects. However, I now realize that I work and function better with other people in a group if there is a good group dynamic. Working in a group allows for us to all have our own creative ideas and ways to do things which can lead to better brainstorming and a better outcome overall.

Upon reflection, another thing that I have learned is the value of time management. For me, I found that one of the most difficult parts in my themed event journey was during HM 317 in the fall. I chose to do marching band for my final year. I thought it was a good idea at the time, but I did not anticipate the stress that would come with me trying to balance the heavy course load, group meetings, and demanding marching band rehearsals and trips. I am the type of person that wants to make everyone happy. However, I was extremely stressed and pressed for time when I had rigorous band rehearsals and performances, but my themed event group also needed to meet at that time. I wanted to represent JMU well in the marching band but I also wanted to make everyone happy in my themed event group. However, all of our schedules did
not line up so we could only meet on Sunday nights where I felt that other groups were meeting more often than that. This taught me about time management and compromise. At the beginning of fall semester, I found myself devoting more time to marching band than I was the themed event. I quickly changed this, though, and learned how to evenly balance both activities to benefit the groups in both organizations. Time management and compromise are important skills for me to take with me to the future because I will need to prioritize important tasks in my job so that I can be successful in my work.

During the debrief with Theresa Lind in the week following our themed event, I remember she asked me, “How do you feel?” The first words that came to my mind were relief and pride. I was relieved that we were able to execute a successful themed event with limited mishaps or issues. I was proud and honored that I had been selected as one of the groups to execute my themed event, as well as to be able to share my hard work with family and friends. Looking back, I remember that when we had to choose our themed event groups in September, I wanted to be a part of a group that I would work well with. Thinking back to September when we had to choose our themed event groups to now, post-event, I find it hard to believe that this process is over. I found myself becoming more and more enthusiastic about our event as the hours, days, and months went by. I was fortunate to have a group with such open communication for new ideas and a group that allowed each person to bounce new ideas and thoughts off each other constantly. The process and approach that my group took to plan and execute our themed event set us up for success. I am very proud of what we accomplished through our hard work and dedication to this project.

The last question that Theresa Lind asked me during the debriefing of our themed event was, “What will you remember forever?” For me, I will remember all of the experiences that
were shared preparing for the event with all of my team members. This themed event experience brought us all closer together. I will also remember our journey in planning the event from the first meeting all the way until execution. It was amazing to see the progression of our basic brainstorming session all the way to the end of the event. I am so thankful to have been able to complete this project this semester. It was an amazing way to end my career in the James Madison University Hart School of Hospitality Management. I cannot wait to see where my future takes me in the Hospitality industry.
II. Future Career Growth

After reflecting on this themed event process, I realize the importance of this project and how it will have a positive impact on my future career growth. Upon graduation in one month, I will be beginning a new chapter of my life as I embark to a career in the hotel management industry. Although I am not going into a career right now in events, I know that I can use the skills that I have learned through this themed event process in my future hotel career. In my new job, I will use the skills of teamwork, communication, patience, motivation, and confidence that I learned from working on this hospitality themed event project. I will need to utilize teamwork skills when I am working in various hotel departments on projects with other staff members. I will also need to use communication to effectively work with staff, managers, employees, other managers in training, or with other hotel departments. I will also need to use patience because not everything is going to happen instantly. This is something that I learned through this themed event process. Not everything is going to be easy, and compromise is a part of the process. I will use hard work and patience to be successful in my job. Motivation is also key to future success because it is important to work toward a goal even in times of stress or frustration. There were times during the themed event where I had to assess the situation to figure out a resolution. While this was stressful at times, it was important for me to keep the end goal in mind and to not lose motivation. Lastly, it is important to have confidence. Something that I learned in this process is that no idea is too big and no idea is too small. Creativity is important to success. If you have an idea for something, you need to be confident in its success and not doubtful.
III. Takeaways/Advice to future Hospitality Management students

1. Be as creative as you can. No idea is too big. With proper planning your team can accomplish anything.

2. Have open and honest communication with your team.

3. Make sure to accept feedback and discussion about all ideas.

4. Keep a level head even in times of stress. When under stress, take a step back, breathe, and evaluate all your options.

5. Treat your staff well.

6. Keep a positive attitude during executing of your event.

7. Get to know your team outside of working on the project.

8. Take a moment on the day of the event to see what your hard work has accomplished.

9. Keep open communication between you and your supervisory team prior to the day of the event and/or meet with them prior to the day of the event. It is important that they are as knowledgeable as you are about your event.

10. Not everything is going to work as originally planned, but improvisation and having personal confidence are important throughout this process.
Additional Documentation

Below is a copy of the Themed Event proposal packet that was submitted to the Hart School of Hospitality, Sport and Recreation Management faculty during Fall 2017. This packet, as well as a presentation to faculty aided in the selection process for the themed events.

Themed Event Proposal:

Who are we?

Our HM 317 themed event is Camelot themed and will be based on the medieval era and the history behind King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Our team, the Ladies of the Round Table, include five Hospitality Management seniors. Jessi Mongold is a senior from Ellicott City, MD. She is pursuing a career in hotel and resort management. Her favorite part of Camelot is the beautiful ball gowns. Jane Aronds is a senior from Westfield, NJ. She is looking forward to a future career in hotel and resort management. Her favorite part about Camelot are the knights in shining armor. Alexis Metzgar is a senior from Suffolk, VA. As a double major in HM and WRTC, she is pursuing a career in food publication with a long-term goal of working within a non-profit promoting hunger relief. Her favorite part about Camelot is the fictional aesthetics and the historical charm and story of King Arthur. Jessica Lewton is a senior from Fredericksburg, Va. She is hoping to become an event planner. She is excited for our Camelot theme to come to life to take the guests back in time to experience the medieval food, music, entertainment and ambiance. Lastly, Danielle Yutzy is a senior from Harrisonburg, VA. She is interested in pursuing a career as an event coordinator. Her favorite part of Camelot are the stories that were created from this enchanting place.
This theme was developed upon the brainstorming of several topics. What captured the interest of this theme to all team members was the potential to bring royal and antiquating aspects of the Medieval time period to life, the originality, and the complete immersive experience we saw possible. Each team member had creative ideas for decorations, food and beverage, and entertainment to bring to the table. We believe that this will create a unique and unforgettable experience for all guests. We hope to execute this event to portray all that we have learned in our Hospitality Management courses and to bring King Arthur’s Camelot to James Madison University for a memorable evening.
Our Vision

The vision of our event is to have guests step back in time and enter the court of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere and embark on a Medieval Experience. We aspire to have guests be amazed at a one-of-a-kind event inspired by the royal court and castle of Camelot from the Middle Ages. With authentic decorations, a comedic performance, and medieval themed food, guests will feel as though they stepped out of the 21st century and into the 12th.

Our mission statement is to come together as a team to create a successful, memorable and immersive event. Our vision of a functional team includes open communication, following deadlines, staying in good communication outside of meetings, organization, mutual respect, and enthusiasm for planning an executable event. This event will be held on Saturday, February 10, 2018 at 5 pm in the Festival Grand Ballroom.
The honor of your presence is requested for the feasting and merriment at a Medieval Banquet honoring

THE DUKES AND DUCHESSES OF CAMELOT

FEBRUARY 10, 2018

Festivities at 7:00 pm, with a banquet to follow at the

Festival Conference and Student Center
James Madison University
1301 Carrier Dr.
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

RSVP and more information at
https://sites.jmu.edu/camelotFA17
**Food and Beverage**

**Camelot HM 317**

**February 10, 2018**

**Reception Menu**

**Sword in the Stone**
A delectable combination of cheeses formed into balls with sword toothpicks pierced through the center to resemble the infamous King Arthur’s sword in the stone.

**Meat Pie**
Warm mini beef pies served in a flaky pie crust seasoned with thyme, chopped onions, and bay leaf.

**Merlin’s Roberdavy Punch**
A tart and fruity sparkling grape juice served in a goblet for medieval flair.

**Hot Mulled Apple Cider**
A sweet and fresh taste of apples in a warm cider.

**Dining Menu**

**Appetizers**

**Earthapple Soup**
Chunky potato soup in a warm vegetable broth.

**Rosemary Rolls**
Doughy rolls seasoned with rosemary served with creamy honey butter.

**Entree/Bellytimber**

**Traditional Turkey**
Turkey leg done-to-a-turn and fit for a king, served with roasted carrots and mushrooms and seasoned with thyme.

**Vegetarian**
Roasted carrots and mushrooms seasoned with thyme served on a bed of rice with a side of green beans.

**Dessert/Kissing Comfits**

**Apple Cobbler**
Nesh apple cobbler served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.
Sword in the Stone Cheese Balls:  
Mini Beef Pies:

Merlin’s Roberdavy Punch:  
Hot Mulled Apple Cider

Rosemary Rolls
Earthapple Soup

Traditional Turkey with Mushroom, carrots and Thyme.

Apple Cobbler with Vanilla ice cream
Logistics

The venue for this event will be James Madison University’s Festival Grand Ballroom. We have split it into 3 separate areas; 1 for dining, 1 for reception and one for our satellite kitchen. Each space is setup to best fit the event. Our Reception area will look like the outside of a castle, and will feel as though you are in the courtyard of a castle, with festive banners hanging from above, a stone foundation, walls covered in stone and ivy, and topped off with an elaborate castle entrance to resemble a drawbridge. There will be a registration area at the entrance as well as our coat check. Once the guests enter reception they can find there way to the drink station or to either of our photo booths.

After reception, guests will be courted to enter the “castle”/dining portion of the event. Our dining area is staged to incorporate the knights of the round table in the center with unique seating around to match the big grand tables seen in old castle dining halls. We have set up a stage area that will represent the throne, and during the main course of the meal, the throne will showcase our jesters. They will be performing a comedy skit because jesters were known to be sort of jokesters. They will also be walking around throughout dining area acting silly and taking funny pictures with our guests. Our satellite kitchen in conveniently located adjacent to both rooms. Aramark Dining Services will provide the Food and Beverage for the event. This event will be staffed by Hart School students and attended by faculty, staff, family, and friends.
Decor

In the reception, there will be paper resembling stone to be hung on walls, an elaborately decorated castle door, a stone fountain, ivy draping and medieval banners hanging across the ceiling.

In the dining area, there will be wall decor of shields, torches, and a stained glass Gobo projection.
On stage, there will be a decorated throne draped in ivy and gossamer with two seats.

There will be six large medieval shields/banners hanging from the ceiling, and there will also be black chair covers on each seat with shields and crests tied to the back.

For table set up/layout, each table will have 1 fork, 1 soup spoon, 1 dessert spoon, 1 knife, and 1 maroon napkin on top of golden chargers. There will also be a wine glass at each table setting filled with water.
Each table centerpiece will be comprised of golden candelabras, black velvet runners, black linen and will be lightly draped with ivy down the center of each table.

The service style of all food in reception will be passed and in dining will be plated.
Production Schedules

Event Date: Saturday February 10, 2018

Event Location: Festival Ballroom

9:30 am: Team Camelot arrives to Festival to begin with preparation.

12:15 pm-12:30 pm: Staff Arrival, check in and welcome. Staff should place their belongings in a conference room.

12:55 pm: Staff tour of the building, meeting the supervisors, and supervisor introductions. We will convey our overall theme and goals for the day during this part of the day.

1:05 pm: Reception, dining and BOH staff will be divided into their assigned groups.

3:30 pm: All staff will meet in the dining room for training. Managers and supervisors will go over the menu, service style, dietary restrictions/allergens to be aware of, how to properly serve, and sanitation reminders.

4:00 pm: Remind staff of duties for reception and dining. (For reception- coat check duties, check in duties, and server duties).

4:15 pm: Break for staff to change into proper attire. They can also grab water or snacks at this time.

4:35 pm: When staff return from their break, a quick run through of how they day should go will be explained once more for clarification. Staff heads to their respective locations after.
5:00 pm: Guests begin to arrive.

5:05 pm: Servers begin to pass hors d’oeuvres to guests

5:15 pm: Make sure beverages are still full

5:30 pm: Trumpeteers play welcoming fanfare to signal for guests to heading into the castle (dining room).

5:35 pm: First course served

6:00 pm: Main course served

6:05 pm: Jesters put on a comedy skit and entertain guests with jokes

6:40 pm: Dessert served

7:00 pm: All plates cleared

7:00 pm: Event ends

9:30 pm: Estimated time of finished clean up and dismissal. Staff may not leave until a supervisor signs them out.
Event Program

Entertainment

Our event will encompass numerous aspects of entertainment to ensure that guests have an unforgettable experience. For the reception, there will be two photo booth stations. The first photo booth will have medieval themed props such as King and Queen crowns. The backdrop for this photo booth will be a depiction of a castle on a hill. The second photo booth will be the famous Sword in the Stone from King Arthur where guests can take photos as they test their strength. The backdrop for this photo booth will be a brick wall to resemble the outside of a castle. During the reception, there will be background music played to represent music from the medieval time period. Following the reception, there will be a trumpet musical fanfare played by JMU Marching Royal Duke trumpet players to signal for guests to enter the dining area. During the dining portion of the evening, cast members from Maddy Night Live will dress as court jesters and perform a comedy act and tell jokes to the audience. The jesters will then walk around the dining area to interact with guests throughout the dinner.

During the dining portion of the evening, there will be a throne on the stage with two seats decorated for the actors in jester costumes to perform their comedy act. There will also be a Harp player performing throughout the remainder of the dining portion.

These aspects of entertainment are important to our event as they portray elements of the Medieval era. Kings and Queens were key elements to Camelot and the Medieval time period.
which is why the first photo booth will have medieval props. The sword in the stone is also a key element to the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round table. Court jesters were a part of the atmosphere of the castles in the Medieval eras and are known to be funny and light-hearted, which is why it would fit the theme to have actors dressed as jesters put on a comedy show for guests while they dine in our castle themed dining area. The trumpet fanfare is also an important element for guests as it will create a scene of royalty for guests to enter the dining area for dinner. Lastly, the Harp player would create an ambience of a fancy castle so that guests can pretend that they are true royalty for the evening.
Through our Camelot themed event, we aspire to create a medieval atmosphere for guests to step back in time and enter the royal court and kingdom of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere in Camelot. This will be possible through the use of authentic decorations, trumpet heralds, a comedic performance by court jesters, medieval music to set the ambience, and themed food. We aspire to have guests feel as though they stepped out of the 21st century and into the 12th. This event will be held on February 10, 2018 at 5pm in the Festival Ballroom. As a team, we have spent 134 hours creating this plan. Our team’s mission is to come together to create a successful, memorable, and immersive event. Our vision is to create this event through open communication, meeting deadlines, staying in good communication outside of meetings, remaining organized, having mutual respect, and having a strong enthusiasm for planning an executable event.

Our budget, which forecasts 85 guests, is break-even, with a contingency of $110.79. The budget is divided into four categories of expenses: Dining, Decor, Entertainment, and Overhead.

The most expensive category is Dining, which includes horderves, drinks, and a three course meal, catered by Aramark. The food comes to $20.50 per guest. Also included in the dining category are goblets and sword food picks for reception. We will purchase these in addition to what Aramark is providing.
Decor is the second largest expense, and is divided into Reception and Dining Decor. In Reception, the stone wallpaper used to create the outside of the castle is the largest expense. The other main purchases for Reception will be for the two photo booths, including the backdrops and props. For the Sword in the Stone photo op, we will purchase the materials to make a paper mache stone. For Dining, the table decor is the largest expense. This includes candelabras and taper candles for every table, as well as place cards for guests to find their seat and artificial fruit to decorate the round table. Decorations for the dining room itself also includes shields to decorate the backs of the chairs, a bogo of a beautiful stained glass window, and long tablecloths to drape from the ceiling.

Entertainment is our smallest category. Many of our entertainers are from student organizations who have volunteered their time to help us put on this event. The one expense will be $75 for the harpist who will be playing for guests throughout dinner.

The overhead category includes the Festival use fee of $50.00, as well as snacks, drinks, and dinner for the 40 staff members that will be working our event, which comes to $100.87.

In the reduction budget, which would provide for 68 guests, our expenses exceed our income by $16.78. However, this is a 20% reduction, and falls below 75, the minimum number of guests. Therefore, we do not view it as a cause for concern. The prices on food and table settings vary from the original forecasted budget. There is also a difference for the royal photo booth. Instead of providing two sets of crowns and jester hats, our reduction budget only has one set. With less guests, there will be less of a line for the photo booth, and the additional expenditure is unnecessary.
## Budget implications based on guest count

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Additional Credits

I would like to acknowledge and credit my wonderful team members for their participation, help, and support in the themed event process. This project was a collaborative effort shared among my group members and me. In the fall I worked with Jessica Lewton, Danielle Yutzy, Jessi Mongold and Alexis Metzgar to plan our themed event and to create the Themed Event proposal displayed on page 60 of this document. In the spring, I worked again with Jessica Lewton and Danielle Yutzy, as well as Tori Richardson and Megan Crampton to finish planning and executing our themed event.