

## University Guest House and Conferences Annual Report 2020-2021

The Guest House and Conferences provides lodging and meeting venues for the University of Utah faculty, staff, partners, guests and visitors. In doing so we attempt to create loyalty to the university, recruit new students, increase exposure to the University, support university programs, provide a supportive working environment for students, provide excellent customer service and create memorable guest experiences.

In FY21 we continue to partner with the campus community to support events, programs and housing.

We are a safe space on campus. The Guest House provides services to all guests, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, religion, age or sexual orientation. We do not discriminate against any groups and welcome all who come to visit the University, the hospitals and other campus entities.

COVID-19 is still having a huge effect on the Guest House. University travel has been restricted both incoming and outgoing and meeting restrictions have effectively stopped our conference operations. The Hospitals and clinics have also reduced elective procedures and so our hospital guest occupancy which is normally 50% of our business is down to 10% max.

Hotel operations were still going strong through the fiscal year, however. Ratio of staff to workload kept us busy. Staff that stuck through did an exceptional job adapting to the many changes due to COVID.

Replacing staff has been a struggle. We were able to find student applicants for desk positions but consistent reliability is an issue. Housekeeping applicants are nearly impossible to find. Many hotels/hospitals are paying much more than we are offering.

We are continuing our high level of customer service and cleanliness, however, we have had to pull room inventory from availability to stay on top of current occupancy levels and to prepare for parent/student move in week and HRE Fall Community room modifications.

The last quarter of 2020 has seen improvements as restrictions are lifted and we can provide more services and house smaller meetings.

We are still working on a skeleton staff in our conference department. With no hourly staff, our professional staff has been doing everything. Taking sales calls, detailing meetings, setting up spaces, etc. We are hoping to be able to add staff in the next fiscal year as things start to pick up.

## Core Objectives:

In support of the mission of the University we focus on providing excellent lodging and meeting space to all who come to our campus. Our business mix is primarily hospital patients and visitors and campus departments. Student parents and hosted public events round out our occupancy. By providing these accommodations we create an outstanding guest experience that shows off what the University of Utah can do, thus creating a sense of familiarity and loyalty to the U.

Students are a big focus of employment for us. We provide a flexible on campus location for students to interact with visitors from throughout the world and become intimately involved in many of the programs held on the University campus. We provide a safe environment, which is convenient and close to classes. We immerse them in the University of Utah culture in hopes to make their education experience richer and more immersive.

Our summer programs focus on student recruitment. We house approximately 9000 students in a two-month period. Most of these youth are high school age. We expose them to the University campus and give them a taste of what it is like to live and learn on a University campus. We hope that through these experiences they will choose the University of Utah when making higher education choices.

By holding public events in our facilities, we increase the University of Utah's exposure to the community and nationally. We hope that this exposure ultimately leads to larger enrollment and recognition for the work done at the U.

## Goals and outcomes:

Maintain occupancy: Pre-COVID our occupancy levels were rising, our service continues to be top notch with a continued #1 rating on Trip Advisor and positive guest feedback. We continue to support the University of Utah community through hosting events, donating time and space. We continue to employ students in all areas of the Guest House operation. Adapting to COVID restrictions has been tricky, however, we have been able to provide contactless check in, physical distancing in our lobby, approved cleaning and sanitation procedures, PPE for staff as well as convert our buffet breakfast to a deluxe grab and go.

Keeping students engaged: on campus is another goal of the University Guest House. We hire approximately 30 students throughout our operations. We create flexible schedules to work around their school schedules. We understand the needs of the student and our goal is to allow work to fit seamlessly with education. While we don't collect data regarding graduation, we know through anecdotal evidence that our employees graduate successfully and go on to have careers at the Guest House, the University or with other companies. Feedback from employees is overwhelmingly positive and many talk about their experience at the Guest House as critical to their success at the U. We continue with our

revamped training and development program to ensure that students are taking away business and life skills that are useful in their major pursuits.

#### Utilization Data:

We strive to create parent and student loyalty to the University. We measure this through feedback and data collected from our property management system. We also can mine this data from Trip Advisor where public feedback ranks us against our peer hotels. We were #1 of all hotels in Salt Lake City for the FY 2019/2020. This is our 6<sup>th</sup> year in this spot. We have been able to take advantage of this and, again, adjust our room rates to better align with the market. We continue to use yield management to adjust rates based on demand and occupancy. This has allowed us to increase overall room revenue while maintaining occupancy levels. We have celebrated many campus events through branding. Game Days, Homecoming, Red White and U, Graduation, etc. Creating a unique University of Utah feel which develops loyalty. We continued to maintain our partnerships with Utah Presents, Keep it on Campus, U Health and the Foothill Cultural District. This year we added a new marketing partnership with athletics. COVID unfortunately has sidelined this effort, however, we are optimistic for the future once in person sport viewing returns.

We served approximately 60,000 guests and visitors in FY21, consisting primarily of student parents, hospital patients, and isolation/quarantine students and had 30,500 occupied room nights. Our meeting occupancy consisted of 39 individual bookings, primarily consisting of University meetings and trainings.

We are still running on a significantly reduced staff of 21 part time and 16 full time. This is down over 50% from previous years.

#### Plan for the future:

Our main challenge each year is increase in lodging and meeting opportunities on campus and in the surrounding area. We continue to be competitive and work to provide a better experience for our guests. We can capitalize on our campus connections and our ability to understand the campus needs. We have developed strong relationships with most campus entities, which is a big help. We constantly adapt to our environment with technology and amenities that make us stand out above the rest. Virtual and Hybrid meetings are a strong focus for our event team.

We now have 30 additional rooms with kitchenettes and amenities for hospital guests and visiting staff who have families and who are here for long periods, a large meeting room with capacity of 250 and an outdoor plaza for events. This expansion included a remodel to our lobby providing more space for guests to meet and created a larger area for breakfast.

We continue to focus on technology, amenities, service and creating unique guest experiences.

Continuous improvement is vital to our success. We continue our hotel wide soft goods upgrade project. All rooms, meeting rooms and common spaces have been re-carpeted.

We have been successful in increasing revenue through rate adjustments again this year. We will monitor this for next year to see if this strategy will be as feasible.

We are focusing on green initiatives. Reducing single use bottles and disposable products is our goal for the next FY. We are working on new recycling programs and other ways to reduce consumption of single use products as well as electricity and water.

With covid restrictions lifting we are focusing on safe in person meetings as well as virtual and hybrid meetings.

COVID Anticipated Challenges: The Guest House is still facing some significant challenges financially. With some restrictions in place both locally, University and nationally, we have seen travel severely decreased. The threat of the Delta variant and vaccine hesitancy, this impacts our budget dramatically. We are working on alternative ways to bring in funds but at this point there is not much else we can do as we wait out the COVID-19 impact. Since occupancy is very low, we are looking at ways to partner with other entities on campus and in the community in ways that can fill rooms and meeting space as well as bring in additional revenue. COVID rates are a huge moving target currently and stabilization is essential before we can see progress in this area.

Keeping staff is also challenging. We have seen increased turnover this past 6 months due to fears of COVID infection, students returning home, changes in work environment and other factors. We are working to increase starting wages in all areas to be competitive in the market place.

B. Anticipated opportunities: We are looking at ways to utilize our space for hospital housing, potential classrooms space and student housing as well as continued Isolation/Quarantine housing. We are transitioning our events to virtual and certifying staff in this new industry. Once restrictions are loosened, we can start hybrid meetings with both on-line and in person learning. Adaptation is the key. Finding ways to serve the community in a more distanced way while waiting for more normalcy.