We have eaten in restaurants, but do we know how much effort it took to get the food to our tables? Do we know what goes on in the projection booths at movie theaters? Most people are not aware of the work that goes on outside a finished product; this is why we will be exploring Patron Services activity system at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. This staff gives the first impression of the center, yet seldom do we, as patrons, take notice of their efforts and duties. Patron Services, also known as the Front of House staff, serve patrons through ticket taking, checking coats, helping handicap people to their seats, and watching for the well-being of each person that comes through the doors of Krannert. This activity system thrives on clear communication, especially through the medium of written text documents. In this proposal we will explain why our group is qualified to research Patron Services and their writing practices. In addition, we will outline our plans for the project, including what we are researching, how we will be conducting research, and who we are researching for. This proposal contains a timeline of when tasks such as research, interviews, and writing will be accomplished to help our group progress towards a thorough report. This timeline will also specify when our group will convene to bring our findings together. Finally, this document will explain the benefits of exploring the Patron Services activity system and present a few sources that will help us bring these benefits to the Champaign-Urbana community.

We decided to do our research project on the Krannert Center of Performing Arts. Like many other programs, centers, and theatres, it is composed of various activity systems. We chose to focus our research on their patron services. Without customer service, this concert hall would have no foundation to build upon. Our group believes that we have the qualifications to exceptionally work on this specific activity system. All of our group members have had experience in areas that are similar to the tasks that are performed in the patron services at the Krannert Center. Tracy is our closest tie to the auditorium itself. She has been working at the center as an employee of patron services for two semesters. This is a big advantage because it can help us get in contact with the managers for interviews and any other questions we may have. She has also been able to explain to our group the basic hierarchy the patron services, to help us better understand the system. Having Tracy in our group also helps us stay updated on current events happening at the center. Michelle has had four years of prior experience working with the theatre department at her high school. Her tasks mainly consisted of ushering and organizing the concessions stands for play intermissions. Most importantly, she served as a house manager her last few quarters of high school. This gave her the opportunity to manage all the aspects of the house on a night of an event. Another group member of ours, Chris, has been an employee of Starcourse, where his job included ushering and various forms of customer service. Quality customer service has been a position all of our group members have played an active role in. We can use our experiences to better identify the services provided at the Krannert Center.

Within the Krannert Center for Performing Arts, there are many activities that go into staging a performance successfully. Our group will focus and analyze the patron services team. Patron services are responsible for many duties that involve the general audience of a performance. These duties include coat check, ushering, ticket verification, and general
customer service. For a show or performance to be successful, patron services must satisfy the general well-being of Krannert’s customers.

To better understand how the patron services team operates, we must look to important tools they use to sustain operations. For every performance held at Krannert, each member of the team receives a sheet outlining the night. This outline includes many aspects of the show, as well as how the team should handle certain situations. For example, the outline contains the start time, venue locations, the duration of each act, and estimated attendance. In addition, it informs the team of when to seat late arrivals, the manager in charge for the night, and the location of trained EMT’s in the event of an emergency. The outline is dynamic, as it changes for each performance, but we also plan to analyze the history of its format and how it has changed over the years. We felt that this was a great tool to analyze due to its importance for patron service’s success.

Our research will aid in understanding not only the general system, but also why the event outline has become such an important tool to patron services. Our group plans to conduct interviews with two managers from patron services. The first interview will be with the head manager of the department. Here, we can get a larger perspective of patron services. Also we will interview the student house manager, Courtney Egg. Courtney started working as a host within patron services and worked her way up to house manager. We feel that she can give us insight into the various roles and divisions of labor within this system. Our research will also consist of an observation of a typical shift. We can learn some of the nuances that take place during the night of a performance. Lastly, we will analyze documents pertaining to patron services. We plan to research old and new handbooks, emergency manuals, schedules, and any other articles written by or regarding the system. We hope to gain a feel of how patron services operates and the Krannert community that surrounds patron services.

Through our analysis of this activity system, we would like to gain interest of not only Krannert visitors but the entire Urbana-Champaign community as well. Our audience is an extremely diverse crowd, but since Krannert has done such a great job appealing to various audiences we must consider all patrons. For example, on the same night Krannert can hold various events. In one theater there can be a jazz guitarist while a circus is next door and music students across the hall. We need to focus on every Krannert visitor since they all use patron services in one form or another. In addition, The Krannert Center is an amazing place that also attracts patrons in the surrounding community. In turn, our audience also consists of very young to very old patrons or potential patrons. Although this audience may not have used any patron services, we would still like to inform them of the hard work that goes into staging a performance. If they choose to attend a show at Krannert in the future, they may gain an appreciation for those behind the scenes or realize other great things Krannert can offer in addition to the show. Our audience is broad but due to the nature of the Krannert center’s appeal, each person within the community should be recognized.
Krannert Center of Performing Arts is a big part of the culture here at the University of Illinois. We hope to find out how something with such an impact on our university was established. Even though, the patron services at the Krannert Center do not play a big role to the university as a whole, it is a huge contribution to the performing arts center. The university is compiled of small activity systems, without them there would be no university. We hope to show how this small activity system is important and the role it plays in the bigger picture.

The Krannert Center not only provides a first-class performance venue for central Illinois, it serves as a historical marker for the University of Illinois. By examining the Patron Services activity system, we will understand how they contribute to the Krannert management and how their written text documents serve as vital tools. We chose to explore this particular activity system because we want to be aware of the people and tools that go into making a night at the Krannert successful. We hope to share this information with the University and people of Champaign-Urbana to broaden the study of business writing. Furthermore, our audience will come to appreciate the Krannert Center for all that it does for the community. To start this research project, we will first gather text documents from Patron Services and articles of the
Krannert Center for Performing Arts. After learning more about the activity system and surrounding environment, we will be able to conduct interviews and make observations of the staff. Our group will analyze this information and make conclusions that will hopefully enlighten us and our audience about Krannert’s inner workings and the tools employees use to do their job well. Although our research of Patron Services is still in its early stages, we have already realized that business writing is not confined to memos, reports, and proposals. Business writing takes place in every activity system, and we will do our best to contribute to the study of these practices.

SOURCES:
House Manager Interviews, History of Krannert, Rules of the road for job position, Job Postings, Surveys, Event Programs