

THR 489: Final Project
Student: Hayley Rosenau
Project Date: October 8-11, 2025
Evaluator: Mark Lewandowski

Overview

Hayley produced *'Night, Mother*, a two-hand one-act play that discusses suicide, ending in one of the characters shooting herself offstage. It is a heavy story dealing with a serious subject. Hayley has a knack for comedy and was encouraged by many to go after her strengths rather than tackle this play. I suspect this had less to do with her ability to do the role, but the question of how it would affect her own mental health. As well, this show would be a tough sell, and it could be difficult to pull together a team that wanted to deal with the subject matter. Yet Hayley stuck to her guns as she found the script engaging and felt the topic of suicide was worth discussing.

For her measures of success, Hayley opted for three common types of measures: Paying her team, having a minimum number of patrons, and making a profit for herself. Additionally, she added one dealing with her personal health that really was focussed on stress management and self care. She reached all these measures. She should be proud of the project she produced and what she learned through the process.

Pre-production

Royalties

As the play was part of the Dramatist Play Service catalogue, the process of obtaining rights was straightforward. Hayley expressed surprise that the royalties were so expensive, but the flat figure of \$130 per show is a standard amount for non-professional rights for non-musicals. However, the figure being in US funds made it closer to \$175 per show.

Considering the exchange, this represents almost 20% royalty for her house of 60 seats, which is quite high. Non-professional rates are calculated on an average-sized house and do not change with ticket sales. So had Hayley had a larger house size, this rate would come more in line with a 10% rate.

Personnel

Hayley put together a strong, supportive team. Outside of her sound designer, everyone had experience in their discipline. Engaging a technical director—something most students opt not to do—also helped her in the technical week as someone could take the lead.

Hayley had some struggles securing designers off the top. The subject matter made one designer reject the offer, and another was uninspired. She then made some adjustments swapping the uninspired designer to a different area and adding a new one. It is common for designers to reject offers for a variety of reasons, but it is rare to shift a designer to a different discipline. What a great solution!

I suspect had Hayley given some deadlines for responses to offers, she may have saved herself some headaches as she stressed over not getting a response for a few weeks.

Hayley really struggled with creating the contracts. I was never clear on what the struggle was. I suspect it was a combination of wanting to ensure they were right because they are

“serious documents” and feeling that it would take so long to do that it became overwhelming to start. Breaking the task down to smaller parts and only doing one or two contracts a day really helped.

I encourage Hayley to consider further why she found this task daunting. I suspect understanding this will help her in future when she finds herself procrastinating on an important task or project.

Rehearsals

As far as I know, Hayley’s rehearsal process went smoothly. She did have to work at learning lines, but I understand that this process was much easier and less stressful than previous times.

She also had some personal issues arise during the process that could have had an impact on her presence during rehearsal. She was upfront with her director, stage manager, and scene partner, so the impact was minimized.

Production

In terms of evaluating the production, I will attempt to avoid those of an artistic nature unless a decision by the producer directly affected the production.

Front of House and Space

The show was set as an alley in the Studio Stage. There were a few sightline issues particularly when the characters were seated in one spot, but it happened infrequently.

Design

The scenic and costume designs supported the play quite well. The sound design suffered from some technical elements rather than concept. While some of the design worked with a general sound wash, the speaker placement did not account for some localized effects which were then confusing. Additionally, some of the recording was poorly executed resulting in a muddy sound that was distracting rather than adding to the story.

Running

The show seemed to run smoothly with no noticeable blips.

I will admit to being distracted by a swinging blind that moved as the HVAC system turned on. It made some noise and reflected light to where I was sitting.

Program

Hayley produced a 12-page full-colour program. The layout and content were excellent (including a full-page ad for the Suicide Crisis Helpline), although it was surprising that there was a full empty page at the back (normally considered one of the most valuable advertising spaces). She also included an insert for Christmas baking orders. She certainly could have included that information on the back page, but I suspect she had already printed her programs before considering the insert.

There were three major issues though: One, the playwright’s name was misspelled as “Normal” rather than “Norman” on the cast & crew page. Two, there was no credit inclusion stating that permission from the copyright holder had been obtained. This special arrangement notice was required by her contract with Broadway Licensing (Clause 3e).

Three, she also failed to include the Special Note credits of the previous productions as outlined in the Production Terms and more than likely stated on the colophon page of the script (where the copyright information is).

While not a major issue, the author's bio was taken from Wikipedia (kudos for showing the credit of the site) rather than the official bio that can easily be found on the DPS website.

I believe Hayley had someone else design the program who may not have been aware of the possibility of these requirements. While that is a perfectly acceptable delegation, she needs to ensure that all the content, especially the contractual items, are provided to a designer and a proofread is completed.

Administrative Items

Hayley has experience creating events, and that experience gave her a leg up on producing her final project although she rarely connected that experience with this process. That is, the connections seemed more unconscious.

Early on, Hayley expressed concern about spiraling and getting ill during the process. She was determined (as indicated in her measures of success) to get through this production without having a flair up. Despite objectively taking on too much and having several personal issues arise, she took good enough care of herself to weather the stresses and avoid a breakdown.

Not that the process was stress-free. In addition to the stressors in her personal life, she struggled with her marketing and her feelings toward her finances at times. Yet she was able to manage the process well.

General Administration

With the exception of contracts and her marketing, Hayley regularly completed her tasks on time with few struggles. As mentioned above, her issues with writing contracts were peculiar. Other than that, her most stress and frustration came because she did not complete and the execute her marketing plan.

Budget / Financial Report

Hayley claims to have done much better with her finances than she had budgeted. It is true that she brought in over \$1100 more revenue than budgeted and her expenses, without accounting for labour, are below her budget. But including her labour, she actually made a poorer bottom line than her budget (a drop of almost \$80).

It may seem counterintuitive, but this financial picture lines up with her desired measures of success: Pay her team at least \$100 per share and make at least \$200 of profit. Hayley decided to pay her team well over double her minimum and that resulted in her share being less (about 25% less). To be clear, this decision means that she succeeded even if the numbers look a little skewed. She should be proud of this situation.

Some specifics about her project:

On the revenue side, her ticket revenue was over 26% higher than budget while the combined ancillary revenue was 22% higher. Most of this increase to ancillary revenue came from the higher donations and sponsorship. Interestingly, her fundraising, which was the biggest contributor to her revenue, was almost spot on. I believe this was due to her fundraising already in action before she finalized her budget.

She did have some problems with revenue items. Her merchandising went from a \$5 budgeted profit to a \$450 loss. According to the numbers, she significantly overestimated her fundraising. However, her fundraising expenses may include items that should have been assigned elsewhere. She included poster design and a sponsored ad both of which likely should have gone under marketing. By adjusting these items, she overspent on marketing, but her overage on merchandising was only 64% rather than 262%. In the end, she still has merchandise that she can sell or give away.

Despite the fact that her concession sold over triple her intended target, because of increased costs, she saw a smaller profit.

On the expense side, her overall expenses without accounting for labour was just under 3% better than budget with her direct production costs being almost 23% better. When including labour, however, she saw a 26% increase to her expense costs.

Again, this increase is in line with her stated goals of success: To pay her team more while still making a modest profit.

Hayley mentioned early in the project that she hates asking people for money. Eventually, she got over her reluctance when she reframed the idea, so she wasn't asking for money for herself, but her team. In looking at her donations and sponsorship, she needs to realize that people want to help her. And in a large part this is due to the connections she has made over her time in Rosebud. If she wants to continue to produce her own work, Hayley needs to continue to do develop these types of relationships.

It's important to realize that she did not start these relationships with the goal of asking for money. She developed them in part through her passionate interest in being part of people's lives. The Lions is a good example where she is part of this group because of her desire to help people and, in the end, she was helped as well. If she wants to produce more work, she needs to develop relationships because she's passionate about her work and wants people to experience that, rather than just engaging people in order to have them support her financially.

Marketing

As Hayley says in her post-mortem, she did not complete completing her marketing plan, trying to keep hold of everything she needed to do in her head. While she did get the word out leading to more ticket sales than budgeted, I believe it was more stressful for her than necessary.

As to her specific marketing methods, I felt her poster was clear, eye-catching, and interesting. Adding a tag line or something that created some more intrigue about the play would have taken it further. Her social media presence was strong and engaging. Hayley being featured in four different newspapers demonstrates that she made a compelling case to those editors, something she should be proud of.

Reporting/Communication

Hayley did a good job communicating with her team. They all seemed to know what was going on. With a strong team, sometimes communication by the producer is less necessary as each member knows what to do and who to talk to about what they need. I'm unsure if she held any production meetings, but there seemed to be little confusion through the process.

Hayley was always open and present in our meetings. I felt that she was able to communicate what was happening on her project at any point. She was honest about her struggles and how she was responding to any issues. This made helping her discover strategies much easier.

Her post-mortem is quite strong. I appreciate the honesty and depth she covers in the document. My only quibble is her financial report, which is spread over several pages, making it difficult to read. I had asked for a better copy, but she did not get one to me.

Timelines

Hayley's timelines generally followed her plan. She had a strong team that did not require much supervision around the use of time and meeting deadlines.

She mentions that because her project fell on the week of Thanksgiving she had a difficult time with strike as most of her crew was gone for the weekend. This is something that neither she nor I clocked as we stepped through her timelines. Statutory holidays are always tricky in the theatre as shows are project based, so less connected to a regular work schedule. Often times, performances are actually scheduled on holidays as people are more likely to come as they have fewer conflicts or events are scheduled in conjunction with the holiday (e.g., Canada Day). Because theatre is generally governed by contracts, labour laws related to stats do not apply. However, producers need to be aware of these dates and communicate that clearly to the team so any conflicts can be identified beforehand.

Stress Management

I am very proud of how Hayley managed her stress throughout this project. She was intentional about taking care of herself and very forgiving when she needed to rest, despite feeling she should be doing something else.

Hayley loves to bake and finds it well-filling, so it was a natural fit for her to choose that as a way of raising funds. This decision proved to be an excellent way of dealing with her stress while still feeling (and being) productive. This activity proved valuable as she had to deal with some personal issues with roommates and her family. Through baking, Hayley was able to take her mind off of some issues while feeling productive and invigorated; I also believe that this type of activity allows for some fallow time for her to ponder and work through the issues without really knowing it.

As she mentions in her post-mortem, Hayley was extremely busy through the production of her final project, with multiple jobs and several theatre activities. While she performed well through that period, managing her stress and health, I encourage her to avoid being so busy in the future. While there are times when we can get busy, this is not a sustainable situation.

One thing I noticed through this process is that Hayley has a tendency to threat forecast in extreme ways. That is, when considering what may happen, she would often voice first what would be an unrealistic worst-case scenario. This may be just a coping technique, but may also be related to a certain personality trait (when considering something like the Enneagram). In any case, it seemed that it would take perspective from me before she could see a more realistic outcome. One example of this is how she considered approaching potential sponsors or donors.

While this extreme threat forecasting can be common, Hayley should be alert to this tendency in herself. When noticing it, she could try making a classic pro/con list which should help her see other options. Or she should seek out others to help her gain perspective.

And speaking of others, while Hayley certainly demonstrated an ability to handle her stress on this project, I encourage her to develop intentionally a support network where she can seek guidance and a listening ear. I noticed a significant weight released from her when she moved out of an unsupportive roommate situation into a supportive one.

Summary

Hayley had a successful final project. She met all of her measures of success including, most significantly for this project, a lack of flare up in her physical health. I believe Hayley could go on to produce her own projects, especially if she can build a support network around her.

The official grade on the transcript will be a pass. The attached page contains a mark to help the student understand their work relative to other students.