The Walt Disney World College Program:
What It Is, What It Is Like, and How It Changed Me

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Mark Johnson

Thesis Advisor
Eric Johnson

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2006

Graduation Date: May 6, 2006
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ABSTRACT

Ever since I was in middle school I have wanted to participate in the Walt Disney World College Program. This project focuses on my experiences of living and working at the “Happiest Place on Earth”. My program began on January 18, 2005, and was completed on August 12, 2005.

I was faced with challenges that I could have never imagined. There were great days and awful days, but I always came away with something that I could use to improve myself or my work. It really helped me to hone my communication skills, as every day I would interact with people from around the world, some of which spoke no English.

I came away from the program with a wonderful fiancée, a vast collection of memories, friends from around the world, and a new perspective on work and careers. My project will help other students learn what the College Program is all about, what they can expect if they participate, and what they may take away from it.
Acknowledgements

I first want to thank my amazing fiancée Hilary, whom I met during my College Program, for helping me recall our internship experiences. You have an amazing memory, pay great attention to detail, and really helped me with the specifics. You have also been my better half, keeping me on track for my final year, the job search, and the pursuit of our future together.

I also want to thank all of my Disney trainers throughout my College Program experience, who taught me the tricks of the trade, and ultimately made me successful at all of the challenges I faced. I specifically want to thank Steve, my trainer at Mission: Space, and Darren, the trainer who conducted my check-out at Mission: Space, for providing me with the skills to work at the Mission: Space attraction. If it were not for them, I would have never met my fiancée.

To my roommates and fellow cast members, you made my College Program experience complete. You always made everyday life and work a blast.

A special thanks goes to all of those park guests who complimented or commended me and my fellow cast members for doing a good job or for making their day. Our job is to provide you with a magical experience, but you returned the favor and reminded me what working at Disney was all about.

I want to thank my advisor, Eric Johnson, for helping with my writing and helping to organize my thoughts.

Finally, I want to thank my parents for supporting my decision to go on the College Program and for keeping me on track throughout my life to prepare me for the real world.
The Walt Disney World College Program

The Walt Disney World College Program (WDWCP) is an internship that provides students with an education and work experience through Walt Disney World. Internships typically last from four months to seven months. While on the program students can gain relationship building, problem solving, and communication skills that can provide benefits for any career path. Disney classes provide students with classroom knowledge combined with Disney’s vast experience to provide a real-world learning environment. Students will also interact, live, and work with people from around the world.

Walt Disney World

Walt Disney World is the top vacation destination in the world. The resort spans a 47-square-mile area of central Florida. There are four theme parks (Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, and Disney’s Animal Kingdom), two water parks (Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach), 32 hotels, six golf courses, Disney’s Wide World of Sports Complex, and Downtown Disney (a shopping, dining, and entertainment area) within the Disney property. Walt Disney World is the largest single-site employer in the United States. More than 50,000 cast members work on property to facilitate the daily operations of the park, of which a couple thousand are on the WDWCP.
JOINING THE COLLEGE PROGRAM

There are four basic steps that one must go through to become a part of the WDWCP. They are as follows:

1. Attend a WDWCP Presentation – College Program recruiters give presentations at universities all across the country. Students must attend a presentation in order to sign up for an interview. I recommend being well dressed to make a good impression. Presentation schedules are available on the WDWCP website (http://www.wdwcollegeprogram.com).

2. Interview – After attending a presentation, sign up for an interview. This can either take place in person or over the phone. My interview was done the day following the WDWCP presentation over the phone.

3. Accept the Offer – After a couple of weeks, students will receive notification of their acceptance into the College Program. All that needs to be done is to accept
the offer, send in a number of forms and fees, and wait for the start date of your program.

4. Attend Registration – Pack your things and get to Florida on the day of your registration. Once you have done this, you begin your WDWCP experience.

**College Program Housing**

There are two housing complexes where College Program students may stay:

- Vista Way – The original housing complex for the college program, offering one, two, and three bedroom apartments. All of the registration activities take place here. I resided in this complex.

![Figure 2: A Vista Way apartment building](image)

- Chatham Square – A very nice complex offering one, two, three, and four bedroom apartments. I wish I resided here, as it is much better than Vista Way.

![Figure 3: A Chatham Square apartment building](image)
Both housing complexes are gated communities with a 24-hour security staff. Students may visit the other complexes, but they are not allowed at any other complex besides the one they reside in after 1 a.m.

The First Week

The beginning of the Walt Disney World College Program (WDWCP) experience can be extremely daunting. You will be starting a completely new job, living in a new residence, surrounded by the company of mostly strangers (and living with a few of them), and, for most, living in a completely new environment. The first week can seem like a whirlwind, where you simply have to hang on to make it. A lot of activities are packed into that period of time, and tons of information are thrown at you. I will describe what you can expect that first week, and my recommendations for making it a much better experience.

Day 1

Registration activities take up the first day. An eight-step itinerary is provided in the acceptance packet you receive in the mail a few months before beginning the internship, and also is included on the back of the WDWCP guide that you receive the moment you check-in. Check-in starts at 8:00 a.m., and I would recommend getting there as early as possible. I arrived a little before 8:00 a.m. and people were already checking in. The earlier you check-in, the earlier you can be done with your day and are free to do whatever. I also was the first one in my apartment, so I had my pick of bedrooms.

Registration all takes place at Vista Way, one of the housing complexes. You will have to pass through the security gate first thing, so make sure that you have your registration materials handy when you pull in. Signs will direct you to the area where
you need to park and check-in, which is at the Pavilion. Another huge benefit to arriving early is finding a place to park. There are many students already on the program no matter when you move in, so the area is busy even without all the incoming students.

An important thing to remember is to ensure that you are following the Disney Look Guidelines when checking in. This basically means that you should be clean-shaven, have the acceptable hairstyle and color, and generally look presentable. You will sign in, get a “Hello, my name is…” nametag, and embark on the gauntlet of different stations.

Room assignments are one of the first tasks completed. You will be asked for your preference on apartment size (1, 2, 3, or 4 bedrooms) and whether you want to be in an alcohol-free apartment (those under 21 have no choice). It is important to remember that there are two people per bedroom, so if you cannot handle seven other roommates, go for a smaller one. I would also highly recommend requesting an apartment at Chatham Square, as the complex is much nicer, and the apartments are much bigger. I personally was in a three bedroom apartment at Vista Way. One nice thing is that your rent is deducted automatically from your paycheck, so you never have to bother with any of that.

You will also complete registration for your parking decal, assuming you have brought a car. Make sure you have the necessary items, which include a driver’s license, proof of insurance, and a valid vehicle registration. You will be unable to get a decal without it, and your temporary pass is only good for 24 hours. Beyond that period of time, the car will be towed if it is left inside the confines of the complex.
I really cannot stress this enough. If it is feasible at all to bring a car, do it. It is
difficult for me to convey with words just how much easier it will be to do what you
want, go where you need, and get there on time. While there is transportation provided
within Walt Disney World, it is very unreliable, takes an excessive amount of time, and is
simply inconvenient. As an example, I was able to drive from Vista Way to Epcot in
about 15 minutes. When I took the WDW Dynamic buses, it generally took 45 minutes
to an hour. I also saw a Dynamic bus broken down along the highway probably once a
week. If this causes you to be late or miss work, you are still responsible for it and are
subject to any applicable penalties.

A picture will be taken of you for your property identification card, which you
receive immediately. This ID is needed to get admitted through the security gate for your
housing complex, use the Dynamic buses, and can serve as the picture ID when entering
the cast and backstage areas at the parks and resorts. There are no second attempts at the
picture, so try and look your best.

Cast Portal registration takes place after you receive your ID. You will receive
your username and set your own password. The portal allows you to check schedules,
pick up shifts, read about Disney news, and do numerous other cast member activities.

You have the opportunity to sign up for Disney classes. They cover a number of
subjects, such as hospitality, management, human resources, and even Disney security.
Each has a range of activities and responsibilities included.

The final station you go through is the fingerprinting and background check. I do
not think I have ever been fingerprinted before, so that was a new experience. It is a
pretty painless procedure.
Once you are done with all of that, you can finally get your stuff and move in. Depending on what building you are assigned to, or how much luggage you have, you may be better off moving your car. Speaking of luggage, I have a few recommendations. Realistically, all you need is bedding, clothes, toiletries, a computer, and a few other things like recreation equipment for entertainment. The apartments are generally furnished, including cable and internet access. I would advise not bringing a television, as it is likely at least one roommate has one, and you do not want to end up with six televisions in one apartment. I did not bring mine, and we still had three in our apartment.

You are assigned a time for the mandatory Housing Welcome Session, depending on when you arrived. For my program there was one at noon and another at 3 p.m. Because I arrived earlier than any of my roommates, I attended the welcome session before they did, and got my pick of the bedrooms.

Figure 4: The Vista Way bedroom. I am sitting in the chair and my roommate, Andy, is the photographer in the mirror.
A number of things happen at the welcome session. Many of the College Program leaders and security personnel speak about what your experience will be like. A majority of the presentation goes over all of the ways in which your employment and College Program can be terminated, and believe me there are many. They cover numerous rules and regulations, tell you stories about past College Program participants (CPs), and even role play to help get their point across. Based on everything that was said, it seemed almost rare for someone to make it through their entire program. I think scaring newcomers is partially their strategy, but you will learn early what you can get away with.

The final portion of the presentation is from Vista Federal Credit Union, which is the Disney-operated bank. You will have the opportunity to sign up for a savings and checking account. I would highly recommend getting both, as it is very convenient due to the ease of direct deposit for paychecks, and the availability of Vista branches and ATMs.

Once you have finished with the welcome session, your day is done (unless you are going to be a lifeguard, in which case you have a swim test in the early evening). I was back at my apartment by around 2 p.m., and had the remainder of the day to unpack and get settled. All of my roommates attended the later welcome session, so I drove around and explored the surrounding area to find grocery stores, restaurants, and anything else that was interesting.

I would recommend using the remainder of your evening to socialize with your roommates and neighbors. This is important to remember throughout your whole experience, but certainly during the first week. Everyone is in the same boat as you are,
not knowing anyone, so it is the best time to open up and start many of the lasting bonds you will make throughout your program. I am generally a shy person, but I made it a goal of mine to seek out contact and build relationships early on. It is really easy, as you all have a common interest and are very excited to begin your experience.

Drop 2

The second day is not nearly as busy as the first and is certainly one of the most exciting days. When you signed up for the College Program, you gave them your top three choices for which discipline you wanted to work. You will find out which job you have been assigned, which basically sets the tone for the rest of your program. Most everyone will be buzzing around, trying to imagine what their new job will be like.

Beyond receiving your job assignment, there are not really any other planned activities for the day. This day can be best served by settling into your apartment, going shopping for the necessities that none of your roommates brought, or simply learning the lay of the land. This is a particularly good day for socializing, as everyone has a great deal of free time, and most everyone is excited about starting their new jobs, so you can start to find camaraderie with your fellow cast members working at your same park or resort.

My roommates and I used this day to stock the fridge, and any other apartment needs we had. Collectively we spent about $600 at Sam’s Club buying all sorts of things like food, toiletries, and even lamps. One of the best purchases we made was a huge trash can for the kitchen, as the one provided could easily fill up every day. Those without cars should also use this day to take the Wal-Mart bus to get their shopping done, or make friends with someone who has a car. Between my six roommates we had four cars, so we were set.
Day 3

The primary activity for the third day is the first paid activity! All cast members are required to attend Traditions, which is a four hour orientation class for becoming a Disney cast member. This will be your first visit to Disney University (DU), which is where all classroom training activities and academic classes take place. It is important to be properly dressed and following the Disney Look Guidelines anytime you attend anything at Disney University, or else you may not be allowed admittance.

At some points, Traditions will make you feel like you are back in elementary school again. You will do some cutesy activities, such as trying to be the team to write down the most Disney characters in thirty seconds, just to break the ice a little. The instructors also provide quite the Disney history lesson, as it is important to understand the heritage and values that Walt Disney represented. The main idea of the class is to expose you to the Disney cast member culture, and give you an indication of the way you act towards guests, and even the way you should perceive your job. All in all the class is fairly enjoyable, and you do learn a few interesting things about what you are getting yourself into.

There are two cool items that you get on this day. The first is your Disney nametag. The particular design changes (the current ones are for the Happiest Celebration on Earth), so it is hard to say what yours may look like. The first nametag I had was really nice because it had our university name across the bottom. This actually helped out with some conversations with guests once I started working in the park. The Happiest Celebration nametags lacked that, which I thought was unfortunate.
The second item you receive is your Disney ID. This is a very important card that serves a number of purposes. This will provide you access to the backstage areas of the park, for instance I had to show mine to enter the Cast Services building at Epcot. You will also use this ID to get discounts for Disney merchandise, food at some restaurants, and even hotel reservations. The most enjoyable use for your ID is for free admission to all of the theme parks, so on the third day you can embark on the first of many trips to the parks during your program. Playing in the parks is easily one of the best, and surprisingly cheapest, ways to spend your days off. I visited probably once a week, even if it was just to see the fireworks or catch a show.

**Day 4**

On the fourth day you will have an introduction for your area, which is also a paid activity. All Epcot cast members must attend Discovery Day, which is a class, tour, and orientation all at once. The other parks have a similar program with a different name.

Discovery Day began in a classroom located in the Cast Services building. Here we learned more about Epcot, its history, the message and theme of the park, and other information to get a better understanding it all. An important thing to remember is that even though you may work in merchandise in a particular shop in Epcot, you really need
to have a good understanding of the whole park. You need to know where the nearest restrooms are, what the Soarin' or Test Track attractions are all about, or even what time Aladdin and Jasmine will be signing autographs at Morocco. The goal is to empower every cast member with the ability to help guests in any way they can, and that comes from giving us information or access to it, as well as showing us around.

We left the classroom and began our very long tour all around Epcot. We went through backstage areas, onstage areas, spoke with some guests. I have been to Epcot many times, but I still got to do something new that I have not done before. I got paid to ride Spaceship Earth, Journey Into Imagination, and watch the Canada movie. I have to admit, it did make it more enjoyable.
You will also be filled in on some stories that you can relay to guests. For instance, there are eleven countries all around the World Showcase. When Epcot opened, representatives from each country brought a container of water from their respective countries, and poured it into the fountain located in Innoventions Plaza in the center of the park. That water is recycled, so the original water that was brought is still present. This event represents the mixture of cultures present in Epcot, as well as being representative of the diversity of the guests who visit the park every day.

At the end of the day you will receive some practical information. Your schedule shows your training shifts, as well as any classes that might need to be taken. Most people only get their first week’s schedule, but I received a three-week schedule because of my position as a role hopper. In general, all training shifts take place early in the morning. I had a Mission: Space training shift at 6:30 a.m. I also had a custodial training shift that started at 5 p.m. and ended at 1 a.m. It just depends on your role.

You also take a tour of costuming, try on whichever costume you need so you can find your size, and receive a locker. You can checkout five costumes at a time, and I found that the sizes seemed to run larger than I was used to wearing. As a role hopper, we used our lockers quite a bit. Because we had to do multiple costume changes, we could keep spare shoes, socks, and other costumes in our lockers.

Day 5-7

The last couple of days of that first week will consist of training for your particular area. If you are in Attractions, you begin at the attraction itself with a trainer. If you are in the areas of Custodial, Merchandise, or Food and Beverage (F&B), you spend your first day at Disney University in a given class. After that, you begin your on-the-job training. It is very important to be on time to the DU classes, or else you will not
be admitted, your training schedule will be delayed, and you will not be able to begin work.

I had the opportunity to go through custodial, merchandise, F&B, and attractions training on my program. Each provided very different experiences, and training activities and methods were very different for each as well.

For custodial, I first took the Day Shift Custodial class at DU. We were instructed on the proper tools and disposal techniques for everything from ice cream spills to protein spills. A lot of instruction focused on the chemicals that we would be using, as well as guidelines for their uses. Bloodborne pathogens were of particular concern, not only for our safety but the guest's as well, so specific instructions and procedures were outlined here.

Arguably the primary duty of custodial cast members is to be the most knowledgeable staff in the park. The custodial staff has the highest amount of guest contact, and must answer any questions, give directions, and provide immediate service. It is one of the roles with the most freedom, as custodians can move throughout their area, and even leave it if there is a need (such as assisting a lost child).

I got a first-hand look at this role during the last part of the class, in which the group donned some light blue lab coats, grabbed a pan and broom, and went out into the Magic Kingdom through Toontown. We took a look at some of the facilities, talked to some guests, and even did a little cleaning to wrap up the class.

The Merchantainment class provided the basics for working in merchandise. Retail is viewed as an opportunity to entertain guests while providing them with tangible memories. After watching a number of videos and going through some discussion, we
paired up for some hands-on cash register work. There were mock registers set up for us to go through the steps to learn how to properly operate them, and even how to interact with the guests.

Counting the “Disney way” is stressed heavily. Basically, when you give change back to a guest, you state the total, and then count up to the amount paid as you hand them the money (coins first, and then smallest to largest bills). This helps to ensure accuracy, reduces the liability of the cast member in a disagreement, and also shows the guest that you are paying attention and taking care of them. To be honest, it does make it easier to count change out of the drawer if you do it the Disney way. Cash registers with incorrect balances can cause you to get in some trouble, and may lead to payment out of your own pocket or termination.

Probably the most difficult aspect of working the cash register is all of the payment types and various forms that may need to be used. Charge cards, Disney Rewards cards, personal checks, travelers’ checks, Disney dollars, Disney coupons, and cash all have different rules and procedures for acceptance and processing. All merchandise locations also offer shipping to a guest’s home, Disney resort, or to the park entrance for pickup. Each has different forms that require you to receive and enter various types of information. A seemingly simple transaction can turn complicated very quickly. Thankfully all cash registers have a quick reference guide nearby with steps to assist with any merchandising functions.

Disney cast member discounts add another step for transactions, and another possible liability. Guests receiving the cast member discount must pay in full the total amount of the transaction from their own funding. If someone else contributes money,
you must cancel the transaction. A sufficiently serious situation can lead to termination of the merchandise cast member and the cast member making the purchase.

The F&B class mainly focused on safety. Food needed to be suitable for guests to eat, and cast members needed to operate in a safe environment. As cast members it was important to be in good health, never touch food with bare hands, refrain from eating or drinking while working, and wash hands thoroughly and regularly. The food itself needed to be stored, cooked, and delivered at the correct temperatures and under the proper conditions (the “danger zone” is between 41°F and 140°F). Unfortunately they did not give us any food to try out for the class, but it was the shortest class out of all that I took.

Once all of the classroom training is done, you will shadow a trainer and begin your on-the-job training. At this point you are on-stage and at the mercy of the guests. Depending on your location, you may have two, three, or four days of training before you are on your own. When you add up all of the training and classes I had to take for my entire program, I had three classes and twelve days of on-the-job training (which took place over the course of a month). Throughout training you wear an “Earning My Ears” ribbon on your nametag, signifying to guests and fellow cast members that you are a trainee. At the end of training you get to remove the ribbon.

**The Exceptions**

There are a few exceptions to the schedule of this first week, depending on your role. Lifeguards and character performers go through a different set of training and classes because of their specialized roles. Additionally, this seven day schedule may not take place on the first seven days of your program, as you may have a day or two off in
the middle. You stick to your trainer’s schedule and receive their days off, if applicable, while acting as a trainee.

**My Roles**

When I requested my roles upon applying for the internship, I requested Operations first, Role Hopper second, and Merchandise third. I was first assigned the Role Hopper role, and later had the opportunity to transfer to a Mission: Space Attractions role for the last half of my program.

**Role Hopper**

The role that I was assigned for my college program was a role hopper for the Epcot theme park, also known as a Rescue Ranger. Role hoppers have a unique job which requires cross-training in the Food and Beverage (F&B), Custodial, and Merchandise disciplines. Role hoppers are deployed to any location requesting our assistance, for whatever length of time, and fill in for whatever role that is needed. Managers would request our help based on their absence call-ins for that day, so I rarely knew where I would be deployed until I came in each day. On occasion, this would also mean going to a different theme park, resort, or water park. The primary requirement of us was the ability to be flexible and adapt quickly.

I received training in F&B, Custodial, and Merchandise in order to be qualified for the Role Hopper role. I had three full weeks of training for this to be complete. Each week I would train a new discipline. This included one day of class at Disney University, where we heard lectures on the material, watched videos, and participated in activities for training purposes. This was followed by three days of on-the-job training, which took place at various locations in the Epcot theme park.
To describe a typical day, I would arrive at the Cast Services building for Epcot and report to the Rescue Ranger office dressed in the Ranger costume. I would check-in with the deployment staff and wait for an assignment. If I received one immediately, I would report to costuming, get the appropriate costume, change, and report to the location. If there was not an available assignment, I would wait in the office until there was one. In the event that nothing came for an extended period of time, I would be deployed for Super Greeter duty, which basically allowed me to take toys and games to go play with guests in the park.

Typically I was only scheduled for six-hour shifts, but locations would request extensions if they needed it, and I either accepted or declined the extension. On occasion I would only be needed by a location for a couple of hours, meaning I would return to the Ranger office to receive a new assignment. If redeployed, I would need to change costumes again to the appropriate one. The highest number of costume changes I had in one day was four.

Role hopper had its good aspects and its bad aspects. I enjoyed it because I was able to work at new places and try new things almost every day. Only once did I ever work in the same location for two days in a row. I got a good feel for what all sorts of cast members do each day.

One aspect of being a role hopper that I did not enjoy was the fact that practically every day had that “first day” feel to it. I did not know anyone I was working with, I did not know my way around, and I had to ask questions often to ensure I was doing things properly. It was practically impossible to ease into a routine.
I kept this role until the middle of April, at which point I was transferred to the Mission: Space attraction. The Rescue Ranger program for Epcot was discontinued shortly after I was transferred out, and all of the remaining Rangers were permanently redeployed to other locations. I was really glad I got the opportunity to be a role hopper for part of my program, because it provided me with many varied experiences. I was also glad I got transferred when I did, however, as I was ready for something new. There was also an extremely unexpected perk of working at Mission: Space, but that will be discussed later.

**Mission: Space**

In the middle of April I transferred to Mission: Space. I was very excited about this, not only because it was something new, but because I had wanted to do Operations and I like the ride as well. In hindsight, I could not have been transferred to a better attraction.

One major job characteristic of working attractions that was a big departure from anything I did as a role hopper was the focus on safety. Previously, most of my other roles were primarily concerned with providing a great guest experience. While that duty still remained at the attraction, guest and cast safety had priority over anything else. The attraction is safe, but it is probably the most intense attraction in any Disney theme park. Guests view or hear over twenty safety warnings before boarding the ride, and must be at least 44” to ride, if that is any indication.

To briefly describe the Mission: Space, it is a motion simulator ride that simulates being launched from Earth in a rocket on a mission to land on the Mars. The ride system is a centrifuge, which spins to create G-forces, much in the same way that actual NASA simulators are used to train astronauts. The ride is designed so that you are completely
unaware of the spinning, and your mind is tricked into thinking what is happening on the screen is what is happening to you. The ride lasts three minutes and forty-six seconds. There are two preflight briefing movies intended to complete the theme, tell the story, and provide more safety considerations and instructions. This is the only ride in any major theme parks that comes equipped with motion sickness bags.

In order to better explain my duties, I need to describe all of the different areas of the Mission: Space attraction. The following lists each area in the order that you would encounter them if you were a guest visiting the attraction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planetary Plaza</td>
<td>Located outside the building in front of the attraction. There are numerous seating areas, a height stick, and stroller parking here. Figures 9 and 10 show the Planetary Plaza area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Center</td>
<td>Guests enter any of the three queue lines here: Standby (Regular line), FASTPASS (Expeditied entrance with a valid FASTPASS), or Singles (Guests are separated, filling in empty spaces). Guests may also use park tickets to get a FASTPASS from the machines here. Figure 10 partially shows the Recruitment Center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden Queue</td>
<td>Exterior queue area. Only opened during very busy times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sim Lab</td>
<td>Interior queue area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Ops Corridor</td>
<td>The final queue area where Standby and FASTPASS guests are combined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Control</td>
<td>This is the central control and communications center for the entire ride. All four simulators can be monitored and controlled here. Radio and phone communications from anywhere else in the building comes through here. This area is freely visible by guests in the Training Ops Corridor, making it the only on-stage control center for any attraction in Epcot. Figure 8 shows the Mission Control area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Dispatch</td>
<td>Located at the end of the training corridor, this area provides access to the ready rooms. The final height check can be made here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready Room</td>
<td>Guests view an orientation movie (starring Gary Sinise) in this room. Guests in this room are considered to be in the first stage of the ride system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preflight Corridor</td>
<td>This round corridor surrounds the ride room. Guests view a preflight briefing and receive their “assignments” here. It is also the last opportunity for guests to opt-out on the ride. Guests here are considered to be in the second stage of the ride system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ride Room</td>
<td>This round room houses the simulator. There are ten capsules, each able to hold four guests, hanging on giant arms that are connected to the centrifuge. All doors to this room must be closed and locked (done automatically) for the ride to launch. While the ride is running, no one is permitted inside without being secured in the capsule (there is a video surveillance system that prevents this). There are four ride rooms in the building, capable of running independently. Guests here are considered to be in the third and final stage of the ride system. Figure 7 shows part of the ride room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Bay</td>
<td>The term given to the combined areas of the Preflight Corridor and the Ride Room. There are four flight bays, each identified by color (gold, blue, red, and green).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry Corridor</td>
<td>Guests exit from the ride room through here. There are benches and a convenience closet, complete with a sink, located here for guests who are feeling ill affects from the ride. For guest and cast safety, guests may only go towards the exit in this corridor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Training Lab (ATL)</td>
<td>This is the primary waiting area for guests, complete with a small playground, some space-inspired games and activities, and drinking fountains. Guests may also retrieve any lost and found items here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Hilary and I posing in front of the exit doors to the Ride Room. Two capsules are shown in the background

Figure 8: Laurie and I in Mission Control
Figure 9: My parents, Kitty and Eric, and I at the Recruitment Center. The globe behind us rotates.

Figure 10: Hilary and I at the Planetary Plaza. The Recruitment Center is located inside the maroon ball on the right.
There are at least twelve different positions, each with varying responsibilities and duties that I performed as a Mission: Space cast member. Every 30 to 45 minutes I rotated from one position to another, which helped to break up the day and provide new experiences. The following lists each of the positions and briefly describes the duties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planetary Recruiter</td>
<td>Located at Planetary Plaza. Responsible for answering guest questions, directing guests to the queue area, and can perform the initial height check. Half the questions tended to be about the ride, and the other half pertained to the location of the restroom. This is the only position that does not experience the benefits of air conditioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FASTPASS Recruiter</td>
<td>Located at Recruitment Center. Responsible for answering any questions, checking guest heights, confirming valid FASTPASS return times, and informing guests going down the Singles line that they will be separated (FASTPASS and Singles lines were right next to each other).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standby Recruiter</td>
<td>Located at Recruitment Center. Responsible for answering any questions, checking guest heights, and occasionally tending to or assisting with the FASTPASS machines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Planner</td>
<td>Located at Recruitment Center. Responsible for assisting guests to get a FASTPASS, answering any questions, and troubleshooting any problems with the FASTPASS distribution machines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Ops Director</td>
<td>Located at the merge point between the Sim Lab and the Training Ops Corridor. Responsible for keeping the Training Ops Corridor full of guests to ensure efficient loading of guests. Collects FASTPASS tickets from guests, mixing guests who were in the FASTPASS line and the Standby line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Control</td>
<td>Located in Mission Control. Responsible for monitoring all four ride systems (and stopping them if necessary), relaying communications from any other Mission: Space cast members, contacting custodial cast members for events such as protein spills, contacting maintenance cast members for ride problems, and communicating any situations to area leaders or managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Dispatch</td>
<td>Located at Team Dispatch. Responsible for directing guests in the Training Ops Corridor towards any of the four open Ready Rooms and may perform the last height check. Works as a team with the Assignment Directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment Director</td>
<td>Located at Team Dispatch. Responsible for organizing guests into teams of four in the Ready Room. Typically there are two cast members with this position, each responsible for two Ready Rooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch Director</td>
<td>Located in the Preflight Corridor. This cast member is in control of the Ride Room and any other cast members in this area assist him/her. Responsible for retrieving guests from the Ride Rooms, briefing guests prior to the ride, directing guests on and off the ride, ensuring the Ride Room is clear, communicating anything with Mission Control, and operating the ride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GWD (Guest w/ Disability)</td>
<td>Located in the Preflight Corridor. Responsible for assisting guests with disabilities, briefing guests prior to the ride, directing guests on and off the ride, ensuring the Ride Room is clear, and communicating with their Launch Director. Some flight bays may operate without this position filled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Specialist</td>
<td>Located in the Preflight Corridor. Responsible for retrieving guests from the Ride Rooms, briefing guests prior to the ride, directing guests on and off the ride, ensuring the Ride Room is clear, and communicating anything with their Launch Director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry Specialist</td>
<td>Located in the Re-entry Corridor. Responsible for directing guests on and off the ride, guiding guests towards the exit (ATL), and assisting ill guests. This cast member is equipped with a radio to communicate any emergencies or lost and found instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATL (Advanced Training Lab)</td>
<td>Located between the exit of the Re-entry Corridor and the entrance to the ATL. Responsible for directing guests into the ATL, preventing guests from going the wrong direction through the Re-entry Corridor, gathering information for lost and found checks, supervising lost and found items,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attraction must run, at minimum, two flight bays at all times (if one goes down for whatever reason, that still leaves one running and the line still moving). The minimum number of cast members required to run the attraction safely and properly is 14. There must be one Planetary Recruiter, one Standby Recruiter, one FASTPASS Recruiter, one Training Ops Director, one Mission Control, one Team Dispatch, one Assignment Director, two Launch Directors, two Flight Specialists, one GWD, one Re-entry Specialist, and one ATL.

As is evident, there was a lot to learn. Because of the real dangers presented by our ride, cast members needed to take their responsibilities very seriously. Even with all the seriousness, it was a blast working there. I kept this role for the remainder of my College Program.

**My Role Hopper Experiences**

As a role hopper, I worked in over 20 different locations in custodial, food and beverage (F&B), merchandise, outdoor foods (ODF), attractions, and other disciplines.
Most assignments were located in the Epcot theme park, although I occasionally received assignments to work elsewhere. The following lists most of the locations that I worked, as well as a short description of my experience.

**Front Entrance Restrooms**

Discipline: Custodial

This assignment came during my week of custodial training. My particular area was actually located outside the front gates of the park, consisting of two guest restrooms and one cast member restroom, which I thought would be quite uninteresting. In some respects it certainly was uninteresting, but I would say it was a good area to learn the ropes of proper restroom upkeep.

My day consisted of walking back and forth with my trainer in front of the park, checking the restrooms every 20 to 30 minutes. What I found out early on was that while doing custodial, we role hoppers were not going to have access to a number of the tools that full-time custodians use. We got the worst dustpans, lacking the ergonomic handles, and the well-used brooms. I learned a valuable lesson on this day, and that was to never leave your broom or dustpan unattended, otherwise someone might take it if it is nicer than their own (or they simply need a spare). While it may sound silly, I found out it was true much later in my program when my broom was taken while I was on a trash run.

Interestingly enough, one of the restrooms under my watch is the slowest restroom in all of Epcot, dubbed the “Kennel Restroom,” because of the kennel located next door. Traffic is so slow, even cast members are permitted to use it, which is strictly forbidden in all other restrooms.

**Stroller/Wheelchair Rental-Front Entrance**

Discipline: Merchandise

The difficult aspect of this location was my shift time, in which I clocked in at 7:30 am. My entire morning involved the sanitizing, drying, and inspection of hundreds
of strollers, which needed to be ready for guests as soon as they were let in the front gates at 8:30 am. Once this was complete, the remainder of my day was spent doing odd tasks, such as sweeping the area, answering guest’s questions about the park, and the daunting task of organizing and restocking the Disney pin display. I only worked at this location once, but needless to say I was not disappointed about that.

**Gateway Gifts/Camera Center**

Gateway Gifts is located under Spaceship Earth (the giant golf ball). This shop sells a condensed assortment of merchandise. Its “sister” shop, the Camera Center, is located on the other side of Spaceship Earth, and sells photo related items, and is also the place to pick up Disney’s PhotoPass photos. I received a crash course on processing and printing photos, most of which did not really make sense, but thankfully I did not have to be tested on that. Even though the park closes at 9 pm, these shops are open until 10 pm, as they are the last two shops that guests will pass on their way out of the park.

**The Electric Umbrella**

The Electric Umbrella was, by far, my least favorite place to work.

Coincidentally, it was the place that I worked the most, and was the only location that I worked at for two days in a row. Before I forget, the Electric Umbrella is the largest single quick-service restaurant (QSR) in Epcot, selling the typical assortment of burgers, sandwiches, and other fried goodies, and generally feeds most people while they work their way through Future World. When I was assigned there, I either worked in the kitchen preparing food, or at the counter assembling orders and handing them to guests.

Why was it so bad? Well, let’s see. It was fast food, but on a scale that simply makes me light-headed to think about. The counter costume was arguably the worst in Epcot, consisting of black pants and shoes, a black shirt with a yellow collar (which
appeared to have been caught in an accident involving neon confetti and some sort of explosion), and a similarly decorated hat. All allotted breaks were combined into a single break, meaning for an 8.5 hour shift you received a one-hour break.

![Figure 11: A glimpse of the Electric Umbrella shirt](image)

The Electric Umbrella receives the recognition of giving me my single worst day of work of my entire College Program experience, in which my kitchen assignment was to “work the window.” For those who have never done fast food, this is the job where you check the monitors, call out special orders, request replenishments for items like fries or chicken tenders, and put the assembled items in the window for the cast members at the counter. As I peered through the window out to the cash registers and beyond, I saw a never-ending sea of people between the hours of 11 am and 4 pm. I started my day at 9:30 am, and received my break at 4 pm. I literally thought I was going to pass out, but I just had to find a way to pull through. Thankfully it was one of my last shifts as a role hopper.

**The Living Seas**

This was the first location that I ever worked on my Disney College Program. It was my first day of on-the-job training for merchandise, which was nice because it was a
very slow location. In general, only Finding Nemo merchandise was sold there, and I really didn’t do much selling of anything. I remember clearly that my trainer bought me lunch, because she said, “They don’t pay you anything.” It is amazing how right she was.

Journey Into Imagination  Discipline: Merchandise

My second day of on-the-job training for merchandise was at the Journey Into Imagination shop. This shop sold the typical array of attraction-themed merchandise, typically involving the popular character Figment. They also sold photos where it would appear as if guests were in popular Disney scenes with other characters and one of my jobs was to take down names of guests wanting these photos. I also learned the art of money counting, and received a lecture/pep-talk about being responsible and making the most of my College Program experience from one of the area managers.

Test Track  Discipline: Attractions

As role hoppers we were not trained to work at any of the attractions. Sometimes an attraction would need some additional assistance, and they could use us in any non-specialized or safety-unrelated positions. At Test Track I could do one of three things: 1) attraction greeter, 2) line attendant, 3) Kidcot attendant.

As attraction greeter I basically answered questions about the attraction, or pointed to the location of the nearest restroom. Line attendants could work either of two lines, the Standby or FASTPASS lines. The duties included everything the attraction greeter does, but required the additional responsibility of checking heights (44” required). The FASTPASS line attendant also had to check FASTPASS return times, and inform those guests entering the Singles line that their party “will not ride together… you will be separated.”
The Kidcot was the real gem of working there, and oddly enough was despised by all full-time Test Track cast members. To put it simply, I sat at a table located in the Test Track gift shop and helped kids color construction paper cut-outs of the Test Track car and traffic cones. As a role hopper, it was the one and only location where I was able to sit down on-stage, and one of the few in the entire park. I thought it was fantastic.

**Mission: Space**  
**Discipline: Attractions**

This experience was a lot like my Test Track experience in terms of responsibilities, minus the Kidcot. This was one of my most enjoyable days of work as a role hopper, and it can be attributed to a number of reasons. The space suit costume was, by far, the most comfortable costume I had the privilege of wearing. The attraction is very popular, but not many people know what it is or what it's about, which made the day pass quickly because people asked lots of questions. It also helped that it was not a custodial or F&B assignment. As fate would have it, I was transferred there permanently in mid-April.

**Pizza Cart**  
**Discipline: ODF**

My one and only day to work Outdoor Foods (ODF) was at the pizza cart near Test Track. I felt like I was working at some sort of carnival, as another cast member and I were operating out of a trailer. We did have the luxury of an air conditioner to make up for what we lacked in terms of personal working space. The unique thing about working ODF is that the inventory that you have on hand does not last very long, so we were often at the mercy of upset guests and slow delivery people. On a side note, the particular ODF costume I was wearing was referred to as the “Barney suit,” due to it being completely purple and blue.
Ice Station Cool

Ice Station Cool is the shop in which guests can sample Coca-Cola products offered in other countries and purchase a variety of Coca-Cola merchandise (curiously enough, no soft drinks are sold at this location). To me, this was a custodial assignment cleverly masquerading as a merchandise assignment. My experience consisted of picking up used paper cups, mopping the floor, and making a sale at the cash register every hour or so. Roughly half of my conversations with guests revolved around the topic of Beverly, the startlingly bitter drink from Italy that resembles the flavor of bile. The other quirky aspect of working here was the costume, which basically looked like a bright yellow and black snowsuit, affectionately referred to as the “bumble bee suit.”

Mouse Gear

The largest store in Epcot, Mouse Gear, had just about anything Disney that you could want. I worked there quite a few times, and also conducted my third day of on-the-job merchandise training there. The store is so big, they have maps for it. Cast members access it through the underground tunnel, which is basically a giant horseshoe underneath Future World (much less impressive than the one at the Magic Kingdom). About the only duty I ever had there was to operate a cash register, which proved to be quite an exercise.

There were a couple of unique things about Mouse Gear. First, the cash registers used touch-screen monitors, and basically functioned completely different from all of the other cash registers on which we had trained. Second, it was the first time I had to use a Nextel radio, which was generally used to call down to the stockroom for packaged bobble-head dolls or snow globes. Both took a little bit to get used to.
When it rained, the store turned into Grand Central Station, which is something I was not really prepared for. Soaked people streamed to the cash registers to buy ponchos. Budget-conscious guests asked for the largest bags we had so they could make their own. In general, most guests simply sought refuge until the rain or their willpower ceased.

*Future World East Fighter*  
Discipline: Custodial

I found this assignment interesting because of the reasoning for my deployment. I was not given a specific area to attend to, and I was not even responsible for emptying trash cans (although I did if they needed it). I was assigned to pan and broom from the front entrance to the Innoventions Plaza fountain, and throughout all of Future World East pathways. This was because there was a very strong wind blowing east that entire day, so there was a higher concentration of litter on the east side of the park.

*Biergarten (German) Kitchen*  
Discipline: Custodial

As a part of our custodial training, we were required to serve the second half of a shift cleaning the kitchens of one of the restaurants. The first half of the shift involved learning how to clean “street” zones, which means sweeping on-stage areas and doing trash runs. The peculiar thing about learning to clean kitchens was that we were never going to do it again. To me that seemed like hazing of some kind, but that might be just me.

The unique quality of the Germany kitchen is that it reeks throughout of sauerkraut, and removing that smell is apparently not one of the goals when cleaning. The job mainly involved sweeping the floor of the four different kitchens, then hosing it down, then spraying soapy cleaning chemical throughout, and then using a squeegee to
finish the job. This dream job lasted until 1:00 am. I was very thankful that we only had to do it for training.

Liberty Inn

The Liberty Inn was basically for those guests who wanted burgers and fries, but were too lazy to walk back to the Electric Umbrella to get it. Both restaurants required basically the same duties, so it really was not much of a stretch going between. The Liberty Inn was much better to work at, mainly because it was not nearly as busy.

The counter costume was certainly a fun one. I can definitely say that the first time I ever wore knickers in my life was my first day there. The whole place is supposed to have that colonial feel to it.

Figure 12: The American Pavilion at the World Showcase. The Liberty Inn is housed inside.

Liberty Inn Bussing

This location required cleaning tables, removing trash, and sweeping the ground for both the inside dining area and the outside dining area. Probably the strangest part of working here was the female cast member who would steal fries and hide them in the
bushes outside to feed to squirrels. The birds, on the other hand, would make their own food by diving at guests carrying funnel cakes in an attempt to knock them to the ground. Cleaning up all of the powdered sugar was a particularly difficult task.

**Harry Ramsden Bussing (UK)**  
**Discipline: Custodial**

Harry Ramsden is the fish and chips stop at the United Kingdom pavilion. A number of particular aspects became evident to me while working this spot. First, there are really only seven or eight tables that have to be bussed, although there is a bench seating area located down on the World Showcase Lagoon. Second, the birds in this particular area are really bad, because they love both fish and chips. Third, there is roughly the same number of trash cans as there are tables in the area. Fourth, the cardboard trays that the food is served on are quite large. Fifth, this place is extremely busy.

When all of these characteristics came together, bussing became a distant second priority to the constant trash runs. To me, it felt like the days of having those trick birthday candles that you could not blow out. The trash cans were always full, no matter how long ago or how often I emptied them. I was glad I only had to work that spot once.

**World Showcase Floater**  
**Discipline: Custodial**

The day I received this assignment, it was going to be a particularly busy day in the park. Projected attendance estimates ranged from 50,000 to 60,000 (an average day is often half of that). The custodial managers did not give me a particular zone to cover, instead telling me to be a floater for all of World Showcase.

The promenade measures one mile all the way around, and I would make a lap every thirty minutes or so. All in all I probably walked ten to twelve miles that day. Did I mention it rained about as hard as I have ever experienced? Even with raingear I was
completely soaked. For the record, the custodial costume is white, and white does not work well with water. I was glad for that shift to end.

**Teddy Bear and Doll Weekend (Epcot)**  
**Discipline: Merchandise**

This had to be one of the single strangest job assignments I had throughout my experience. The 2005 Teddy Bear and Doll Weekend was being held in the World Showplace, a large convention building in Epcot, located between the Canada and United Kingdom pavilions of the World Showcase. This annual event allows teddy bear and doll artists to show their work, and enables guests to purchase them as well.

My first source of confusion was the admission fee to attend this event, which was $350. This did include a two-day park pass for any of the four Disney theme parks, but what it boiled down to was a fee to allow guests to spend more money on bears and dolls. The primary eye-opener for me, however, was when I started ringing up guest’s orders. I had no idea that the cost of dolls and bears could be so much, or that people would be willing to pay it. My highest total for any guest was between $8,000 and $9,000, but that paled in comparison to the $24,000 amount rung up by the cast member next to me. Because I was on-stage and dealing with guests, I had to save my reactions until later. Coincidentally one of my reactions was speechlessness, so that helped.

The Teddy Bear and Doll Weekend was an amazing exercise in merchandising. Never before had I handled multiple thousand dollar transactions, utilized multiple forms of payment for a single purchase, or filled out so many resort and home delivery forms. My next shift at Mouse Gear was a whole lot easier after this experience. It was also amusing to hear many of the women say, “My husband doesn’t know I’m here. He’s not going to like the bill.”
Super Greeter

Going on Super Greeter duty was one of the assignments role hoppers hoped for when they arrived at work. As stated earlier, role hoppers were deployed to locations based on manager requests. Some days there simply were not requests, so our managers had to do something with us. That is where Super Greeting comes in.

Super Greeting required role hoppers to take toys, props, Mickey stickers, park maps, and any other stuff we wanted on-stage to interact with guests. It was basically an opportunity to conduct Take 5’s and Magical Moments, and just have fun playing.

One of my most enjoyable experiences involved approximately eight role hoppers going out for Super Greeter duty. It was a very warm day, so we took foam balls out with us, soaked them in the water fountains, and got guests to soak our fellow cast members or their fellow family members. We also conducted toy horse races, and even got a cheerleader group to do an impromptu performance. The freedom to do anything and go anywhere, within reason, had its perks.

EMH Waistband Distribution

Wristband distribution was a duty that I volunteered to do on a number of occasions for some easy extra hours. In order to identify those guests who are Disney resort guests, we put a plastic wristband on them in return for seeing their room key. That way it is easier for cast members at all of the attractions to identify who is allowed onto the rides after the park’s traditional closing hours.

An interesting phenomenon that I observed was the closer it got to 10:00 pm, when distribution was over, the more angry guests were when they came to receive their wristband. This was due to a number of reasons, including common problems such as:

- “Nobody told us we needed a wristband.”
"We can’t stay in the park just because we are not staying at a Disney hotel? That’s discrimination!"

"We didn’t have to do this last night at the Magic Kingdom!"

"I can’t take a stack of wristbands for my whole family of 20?"

"I walked all the way to the ride and they made me turn around and come back here."

**Typhoon Tilly’s (Typhoon Lagoon)**

Discipline: F&B

This was my first assignment outside of Epcot. It was a beautiful day outside, so I was instructed to go to the Typhoon Lagoon water park because they were very busy and needed more help there. The difficult part of my assignment is I had no idea where to go. I had been to the park, but I had no idea where I need to check in, get a costume, or go to in the park once I was there. After some directions, I was looking the part and ready to go.

I had been working roughly 20 minutes, and then it started to rain extremely hard. Typically the rain lets up after a while, but this downpour lasted at least an hour. The park cleared out pretty quickly, although a few die-hard swim fans stuck it out. In hindsight, I was not needed at all (although I still got paid).

**Softball Concessions (Wide World of Sports)**

Discipline: F&B

This was another adventure in trying to figure out where I was going. Disney’s Wide World of Sports is an enormous sports complex, hosting all sorts of events. I was needed there to run concessions for a high school girls softball tournament. This job made me feel like I was in high school again. It was a very laid-back day, filled with nachos, hot dogs, and some fine softball. As a side note, I arbitrarily picked my favorite
team, and they won. I am not sure if I was supposed to be cheering or not, but I did not get in any trouble.

Mission: Space Experiences

After having worked as a Role Hopper for three months, Mission: Space presented me with challenges and experiences that I had yet to come across. The first challenge I had was training, which was unlike anything I had experienced before, and it would be the first of many unique occurrences.

Training

Training took place over the course of four days. I was required to be at work early on these days (7 a.m. normally, and 6:30 a.m. one of the days). I met my trainer, Steve, in the morning and shadowed him for the duration of my training. My particular trainer liked to do the hardest stuff first so you will know if you cannot handle the job, so we jumped right into things.

Launch Director is the position that arguably has the most responsibility, as you are in charge of the ride and all of the guests riding on it. I picked up most of the procedures pretty quickly, and this ended up being one of my favorite positions. You are in control and do all the communicating. It is great fun controlling a $100 million ride.

We also trained the Assignment Director position this day. This is a fast-paced position, as you have just over two minutes to direct forty guests to their team assignments. I loved this position, because it kept you very busy, and it was almost like playing a game of human Tetris. You had to find ways to fit varying sizes of groups into ten teams of four. This task was very difficult at first, but once you got used to the process it became easy.
One of the most interesting aspects of training was working early in the morning to start the ride up. This process requires cast members to work in each Flight Bay and in Mission Control. The cast members in the Flight Bay run through a checklist, ensuring systems are running properly, the shows are playing, the area is in proper condition for guests to see, and testing the safety systems. Mission Control cast members coordinate the activities and relay the messages for the opening of all four Flight Bays. It was amazing to see how an attraction such as this is powered up, tested, and made ready for guests. Opening Mission Control was always the best, though, as you got to sit down the whole morning.

On the fourth day of training you check-out, which basically means a different trainer observes you in each of the positions, ensuring you are capable of fulfilling the duties assigned there. You also must complete a verbal test, answering various questions regarding procedures, locations, and even Mission: Space story elements. Once you have passed, you are authorized to operate the attraction and begin your normal work.

**Protein Spills**

Protein spills are a common occurrence at Mission: Space. Anytime you have people spinning continuously for almost four minutes, some are not going to react to well to it. Someone probably got sick every hour or two. It was not always a spectacular, ride-stopping occurrence, but it happened fairly often. That is why we have motion sickness bags in the ride, and they certainly helped often.

Sometimes, however, guests simply make a mess. The spinning, combined with an uncontrolled protein spill, ended up going everywhere throughout the Ride Room. Sometimes it would be contained to a capsule, and other times it would end up on the
walls and floor. Under the worst of circumstances, it could require the Flight Bay to be shutdown for cleaning for well over an hour.

Luckily I was never bothered too much by it all. I would not laugh in front of the guests, but I thought some of what happened was hilarious. On multiple occasions I had a guest come up to me, covered in protein, graciously informing me that they had gotten sick. It is hard not to find the humor in that. The particularly messy ones were always my favorite, as it allowed us to sit around doing nothing while we waited for the custodial staff to clean it up.

![Image of aftermath of a protein spill.](image)

**Figure 13: The aftermath of a protein spill.**

**FASTPASS**

As a guest, fastpasses are great. As a cast member, they really are awful. There are two primary causes of problems stemming from fastpasses: the inability for people to read them and the determination of guests to get in.

There are four important pieces of information on a fastpass. The attraction name, the assigned return time, the date, and the time when another fastpass may be
acquired are all indicated on a fastpass. A guest may only get one fastpass at a time. If a guest attempts to acquire a fastpass before the indicated time, a fastpass ticket prints out with a giant black box on it saying “Not a valid fastpass,” and the indicated time when a new fastpass may be acquired.

![Mission: Space fastpass](image)

Figure 14: An example of a Mission: Space fastpass

If people would read, all would be well. The majority of guests, however, read the time on this invalid fastpass and assume that is their return time. It is an extremely common occurrence to have to turn people away for this problem, and most have no idea, even after receiving an explanation, why they are not allowed in.

The lack of reading leads directly to the problem of the guest’s determination to get in. I had two gentlemen approach me with invalid fastpasses while I was the FASTPASS Recruiter. They had assumed the time on the ticket was the time they could return. Not only was the fastpass invalid, even if the time on the ticket was their return time, they were early as it was. Essentially, I was doubly unable to let them in.

The oldest gentleman did not like this news too much, and began to raise his voice. I could have let him through, but he would have been turned away once he got to the merge point too. He proceeded to get in my face, finger-pointing and all, and stated
"I am going through that door at the time on this ticket." He was much bigger than I was, and there was no realistic way in which I was going to prevent him from going in. I ended up having to call a manager, which he was pleased to have happen too (I got the impression that he assumed I was incompetent at my job). The manager who came proceeded to convey the same message I had, only he simply used pointing and head-shaking.

The unfortunate thing is that we are supposed to uphold the rules, and the managers resolve guest situations however they need to. Those guests were given a pass to skip the line with instructions that they cannot pull this kind of stunt again. In the end, I looked incompetent to the guest and I did my job in the eyes of the manager. It was sort of a bittersweet outcome. This type of situation happened all the time.

**ATL and "Lost" Children**

Many parents do not particularly want to go on Mission: Space, but kids love it. Many parents send their children through the line on their own and wait for them at the ATL. Occasionally the wait times are not exactly what is posted outside, an unexpected delay occurs while someone’s child is in line, or the parent simply does not realize that the entire attraction length is around fifteen minutes.

I am not sure what happens to the perception of time for people when they are waiting for their children when they go on a ride, but it appears to go completely out the window when they enter the ATL. Their other misperception is that the cast member at ATL knows exactly where a given parent’s child is, and is capable of retrieving that child at any point in time. Neither is possible, but that did not stop the parents from freaking out and losing their cool.
This was particularly common during EMH, when everyone was tired and cranky. I had a mother go off on myself and Hilary (another very special cast member) because allegedly “you don’t tell a mother that you can’t find their child at 10 p.m.” After being verbally berated for probably ten minutes straight, their child came through the exit and all was well. The refreshing part was that after she left, another mother came up to us and commended us for handling the situation so well and putting up with that “crazy woman.”

6/13/2005

There are inevitably some occurrences that no amount of training can prepare you for. Pretty much anything is possible at Walt Disney World, due to the sheer number of people coming through the parks. On June 13, 2005, the unthinkable happened, and it greatly changed the remainder of my experience. The following excerpt from a June 16, 2005, Associated Press article\(^1\) describes what happened:

`LAKE BUENA VISTA - A 4-year-old boy died after passing out aboard Walt Disney World's "Mission: Space," a ride so intense that it has motion sickness bags and several riders have been treated for chest pain.  

Daudi Bamuwanye, of Sellersville, Pa., passed out Monday afternoon while on the attraction, which simulates a rocket launch and trip to Mars. The Orange County Sheriff's Office said his mother, Agnes, who was on the ride with Daudi and his sister, carried him off the ride and employees helped her place him on a bench.

Paramedics and a Disney worker tried to revive him, but he died about 5 p.m. at Celebration Hospital.

The sheriff's office said the boy did meet the ride's minimum 44-inch height limit.

An autopsy Tuesday showed no trauma so further tests will be conducted and a cause of death may not be known for several weeks, said Sheri Blanton, a spokeswoman for the Medical Examiner's Office in Orlando.`

\(^1\) Source: “4-year-old dies after riding Disney’s Mission: Space.” South Florida Sun-Sentinel 13 June, 2005.
"Now it’s going to be a matter of, 'If it wasn't trauma, what did it?''
Blanton said.

During the ride, the boy's mother noticed that Davidi's body was rigid and
that his legs were stretched straight out. She told detectives that she
thought the ride was frightening him so she took his hand to reassure him.
"When the ride ended, the victim was limp and unresponsive in his seat,
" according to a sheriff's office report.

I had the day off, but began receiving calls from coworkers that evening. The ride
had been shutdown for the remainder of the day. No one was really sure if we would be
open the next day, which I had an 8:00 am shift for, or when we would open at all.

I arrived on the 14th for my shift, and I found everyone in the break room glued to
the television. We were on the morning news, and some cast members were learning
about it right at that moment. No one was really sure what to say, what to do, or how to
actually go to work that day. It is really hard to describe the atmosphere with words.
There were many open mouths, some tears, and a whole lot of bewilderment.

We assembled for a meeting in mission control, and I have never seen so many
people packed into that space. There were probably thirty Mission: Space cast members,
ten managers, two counselors, and probably some others that I did not even notice. We
used this meeting to ask any questions that we wanted to, and we were instructed on the
procedures for the day. Some cast members who had real problems coping with the
situation were able to take some time off. No one was going to give someone a hard time
if they needed a break from that day, or a couple of days, to come to grips with
everything.

We were not told much specifically about the accident or the situation, but we
received simple instructions. If guests ask about it, and they will, we reassure them the
ride has been inspected and has been found safe for operation. If they have further
questions, get insistent on having us respond to their demands, or if any altercations arise we were to contact a manager to handle it. Typically our managers were not around very often, but we had three or four in the area for the entire week.

The odd thing was that the day after the accident seemed like any other day. Because of the time the accident happened, and by the time the story was run, the majority of guests had not heard about it yet. We had some responses, but it was nothing compared to two days after the accident.

Guest reactions ranged from empathy for the family, to anger and hostility towards us. We all received incredibly insensitive questions and comments from guests, which actually lasted for the rest of my college program. There were a small number of guests who actually supported us for the way in which we were all handling the situation, which was helpful.

From that point on, the lines were always a bit shorter than they used to be. Parents asked a few more questions. “Funny” people said a few more ridiculous comments. I know for me, and I would imagine the majority of my peers, the situation was always on my mind. I was more concerned, especially with small children, if someone needed to opt out. When I used to check, I double-checked, just to ensure something else would not happen.

It turns out that the boy suffered no trauma, but rather had a preexisting heart condition that was the cause of death. It is amazing to think that over eight million guests have ridden on Mission: Space, but this accident changed everyone’s perspective on the ride’s safety.
My Professional Life

One of the greatest benefits that come from working with Disney is the exposure to a one-of-a-kind environment. Every day you interact with hundreds of people from all around the world. Every day you must communicate with someone who does not speak the same language as you do. Every day you are presented with new challenges, and must come up with ways to overcome them.

I have found that I do want to work with the public as a result of my program. Every day is fresh and keeps you on your toes. It is difficult to fall into a routine when the unexpected happens constantly. Being prepared for the unexpected is one of the greatest skills that I gained through my entire time there.

I realized that I was interested in going into retail as a career after working in a number of retail locations. As a result, about a week and a half after I graduate I will begin work for Walgreens as a Management Trainee. This opportunity will give me management experience in the retail field, and provides me with a solid career path which can allow me to support myself and my family in the future. My experience on the program definitely helped me get the job with Walgreens too, as they understood the valuable experience that I gained while there. In fact, my College Program experience was generally the first thing that all of the recruiters and interviewers commented on as I conducted my job search.

Long-term, I do have a strong desire to go back to Walt Disney World and work. I would like to go into management, or participate in backstage activities to really assist in the overall functioning of the theme parks. As a Role Hopper I got the chance to work some special events, and I found that planning and hosting special event would be a blast.
Events planning would similarly provide me with new challenges and tasks nearly every day. It is that type of job that will keep things fresh and keep me engaged.

It is difficult to put into words what attracts me about working at Walt Disney World. It is simply unlike any experience I could have anywhere else. Your primary objective is to make people happy, and there is a real sense of fulfillment you get when you know you have made someone's day. It is infectious, and I miss having those opportunities. I would say there is a very good chance, ten years from now, that I will be pursuing a career with Disney.

My Personal Life

The College Program had a monumental impact on my personal life. It exposed me to all sorts of different people, and I made friends with people all around the world. I had never lived in the dorms, so being thrust into a living arrangement with many strangers was a new and rewarding experience.

The most important person that I met on my program was Hilary. We worked at Mission: Space together, quickly became inseparable, and we now are getting married on July 8, 2006. It may seem convenient to say this in hindsight, but part of me truly believed I would meet someone special on my program. I did not expect that it would be my future wife, but it could not have turned out better. I am living my dream. To be honest, it is not an uncommon phenomenon for people to meet on the College Program and get married. I worked with multiple couples who were already married but met on the program, and I know some who have gotten engaged or married since I have left.
The College Program also helped me to open up more. Generally I am a very shy person, and it takes me a while to warm up to people and be sociable. I have definitely improved in that aspect. I had to strike up conversations and interact with complete strangers as a cast member, so it is not so difficult to do now.

I have ultimately become a much better person as a result of my program, and I would not take it back for anything in the world. I met my better half, and it could not have come at a better time. In two months I will go from a college student to a married man with a career, and the College Program had a substantial impact on that dream becoming a reality.

**The CP Culture**

When you participate in the Walt Disney World College Program, you essentially become a part of a brotherhood or sisterhood. There is an entire culture, full of traditions, inside jokes, lingo, and so forth that go along with being a CP. You can speak to someone who went through the program, no matter where they worked or when they were on it, and have a great deal in common. Reminiscing can occur even if you did not
share the same experiences together, because chances are you did experience the same things individually.

The following is a monologue written anonymously which is regularly posted through MySpace.com by former and current CPs. It highlights a lot of those experiences of being a CP that you identify with once you have been through it yourself:

_I am a Disney CP. Yes I lived in Orlando, and yes, it's shady, but just thinking about it makes me smile. We don't call it Orlando, it's O-town or 32821, get it right. We go to the parks everyday, and make sure we get backdoored onto the rides. And yes, getting backdoored is the best thing ever. We go to Wal-Mart all the time for no reason, and complain because Target has a closing time. We could be from Alaska or Maine, but we still went home saying "y'all." We know what TTC, DAK, PI and all those fun things stand for. We've had to pop our trunks for security. We compare our ID pictures. We sneak guests or friends in after 1 am. Parties happen every night. We were lucky if we got more than 3 hours of sleep. We love going to the Vista Pool, but we'd never go in the hot tub. My car still has sand in it from Cocoa Beach. We ruled PI on Monday and Thursday nights. We have friends in almost every country and state. At least 100 of us can never work for Disney again because we got fired for drinking in our apartments or stealing stupid Disney stuff. We've almost been hit by a Dynamic bus at least 5 times. We still can't figure out what language the bus drivers are speaking in or why they laugh by themselves. We like to pretend that we understand (fluently) every language spoken to us._
know what alpha-unit means, and if our friends at home get hurt, we 
always ask them 3 times if they need assistance. We dated or made out 
with at least one person, whether we liked them or not. I still have a ton of 
those stupid Mickey stickers. I've been to Mickey's Retreat on more than 
one occasion. We point with 2 fingers, not one, and Magical Moments and 
Take 5's make me smile (and yes, we know the difference). I am a CP, and 
I'm proud of it. I hope you have a magical day.

Conclusion

The Walt Disney World College Program was one of the greatest experiences I 
have had. I had the opportunity to be faced with new challenges, meet new people, and 
grow as a person. It is simply impossible to describe all that I learned and faced through 
my program. It is safe to say that I learned something new, faced with a new challenge, 
or did something for the first time each and every day. To anyone who may be interested 
in the College Program, take time and do it. While you may not love your job or pursue a 
future career with Disney, I promise that you will not regret it. No matter who you are, 
what area of study you are in, or what career path you are looking to take, you can benefit 
from your experience on the College Program.
**Disney Glossary**

**General Disney Terms**

- **Alpha Unit**: The onstage reference for an ambulance
- **Backstage**: Disney Resort areas that guests do not have access to
- **Banana Boat**: The custodial term for the carts used to remove trash bags for disposal. Fresh fruits were sold from these carts when Disneyland first opened
- **CP**: Used to refer to someone on the College Program
- **DAK**: Disney's Animal Kingdom
- **DU**: Disney University. Cast members take training courses and College Program classes here
- **ER**: Early release. Used to request to go home early for whatever reason. Has to be approved by management
- **FASTPASS**: A ticket that allows guests to receive priority entry, during an indicated period of time, to attractions. Guests can only receive one FASTPASS at a time
- **FLIK**: Fantastic Line Information Keeper. These are RFID-equipped data cards that are used to keep track of attraction wait times. Cast members scan the cards, give them to guests going through the line, and the cards are scanned again once they reach the end of the line
- **Magical Moment**: This is a planned event for guests that will provide them with a special, long-lasting memory. Guests participating in a Magical Moment receive a certificate to commemorate their experience. For example at Epcot, at the beginning of the day, the Family of the Day is chosen. They get to ride in a
working Test Track car from the entrance to the Test Track attraction and ride it. They then get a Mission Control tour at Mission: Space, and get immediate entrance onto that ride as well

- **MK**: Magic Kingdom
- **Onstage**: Disney Resort areas that guests have access to
- **PhotoPass**: A card that stores information regarding pictures taken by Disney PhotoPass cast members. Pictures can be purchased in the park or viewed online using the card information
- **PI**: Pleasure Island
- **Protein Spill**: The onstage reference for vomit
- **QSR**: Quick-service restaurant, also referred to as a counter-service restaurant
- **RDO**: Request Day Off. As it sounds, cast members submit an RDO to get time off.
- **Signal 25**: The onstage reference for a fire
- **Signal 55A**: The onstage reference for a bomb threat
- **Signal 79**: The onstage reference for a lost child
- **Take 5**: This is similar to a Magical Moment because it is intended to create a special moment for guests to remember, except it is impromptu and unrehearsed. It is up to the cast member to come up with what they want to do with the guests. There are no certificates for Take 5’s
- **TTC**: Transportation and Ticket Center, Disney’s transportation hub for buses, boats, and monorails
- **WDWCP**: Walt Disney World College Program
Mission: Space Terms

- **101**: Attraction is operationally down
- **102**: Attraction is operationally up
- **10-7**: Attraction is down for the day
- **10-8**: Attraction is intended to be working
- **Bubble**: When a Ready Room is left empty, giving the cast members in the Flight Bay with time to deal with any issues (i.e., protein spills).
- **Cycle Out**: The process of closing the entrance of the attraction, but allowing all guests already in the queue to ride the attraction until the queue is empty.
- **Downtime**: Time when an attraction is not operational. There are six causes of downtime. They are electrical/mechanical problems, fire, weather, guest-induced (protein spills), loss of critical audio/video/safety systems, or poor show (inappropriate conditions for guests to see, i.e., big holes in walls).
- **Space Bags**: The motion sickness bags provided for use during Mission: Space

**Nextel Radio Codes**

- **10-4**: Affirmative
- **10-9**: Repeat last message
- **10-20**: Where are you?
- **10-45**: Call me by phone at (fill in the blank)
- **10-51**: Coming to your location
- **10-54**: Negative
- **10-56**: Meet me at (fill in the blank)
- **10-81**: At lunch