

UT-Austin Catering Special Event of the Year

University of Texas at Austin

Introduction:

The 2024 SEC Housing Officers Conference menus showcased Forty Acres Catering’s culinary creativity, turning traditional conference dining into a celebration of Texas hospitality. Inspired by the "Bigger with Texas" theme, each meal featured bold flavors, interactive stations, and locally sourced ingredients. From a Vaquero-inspired omelet to open-fire grilled South Texas antelope, the menus delivered diverse textures and innovative techniques. Nutritional balance and food safety were prioritized through pre-event dietary surveys, labeled menus, and strict HACCP protocols. With creativity, precision, and regional pride, Forty Acres Catering delivered an immersive dining experience that elevated every moment of the conference.

Essay:

The five meals served at the 2024 SEC Housing Officers Conference showcased extraordinary culinary artistry, transforming traditional conference dining into a celebration of Texas hospitality. Forty Acres Catering designed menus aligned with the “Bigger with Texas” theme, featuring globally inspired flavors, interactive stations, and locally sourced ingredients.

Each meal was an orchestrated culinary journey, emphasizing texture, temperature, and visual appeal. Breakfast offered contrast—crispy pastries, creamy yogurt, fresh juices, and a signature Vaquero omelet. The Power Lunch balanced hot and cold options, from tempura Brussels sprouts to carved chicken and Texas Gulf shrimp salad. The reception dinner featured

three indoor food stations and a live fire grill, highlighting mesquite smoked pork belly, delicately tempura vegetables, and South Texas antelope—all presented with creativity and regional pride.

Menus reflected modern culinary trends and nutritional balance, offering lean proteins, fresh produce, and plant-based choices. Dietary needs were addressed via pre-event surveys and labeled menus with allergen, nutritional, and religious icons.

Food safety was ensured through strict HACCP protocols, including temperature monitoring, cross-contamination prevention, and detailed ingredient handling. Head chefs and vendors added an educational element at each station, making every meal a cultural, flavorful, and immersive experience.

#### Introduction:

The 2024 SEC Housing Officers Conference marked UT Austin's entry into the Southeastern Conference with the theme "Bigger with Texas," transforming a professional gathering into a vibrant celebration of Texas culture and collaboration. Forty Acres Catering helped bring this vision to life through authentic hospitality, from personalized airport greetings and a burnt orange carpet to custom SEC vinyl records featuring UT musicians. Cowboy boot motifs, Texas-inspired menus, rooftop mixers, and live performances all reinforced the theme. The result was an immersive, high-impact experience that elevated the conference far beyond a standard meeting.

#### Essay:

The SEC Housing Officers Conference marked UT Austin's entry into the Southeastern Conference and transformed a professional gathering into a celebration of Texas identity with the theme "Bigger with Texas." Forty Acres Catering helped shape the event's narrative through immersive hospitality and creative execution.

The event served two purposes: to convene SEC housing and dining leaders for collaboration and to showcase UT's hospitality and operations. From the moment guests arrived, the theme came to life—Longhorn Hospitality staff greeted attendees with personalized paddles at the airport, followed by a burnt orange carpet and Hook 'Em display at the venue.

Custom vinyl records featuring Texas classics by UT musicians, cowboy boot motifs, and consistent graphic branding elevated the event atmosphere. Decor included printed menus, record covers, concert posters, themed lighting, and an ice sculpture. Meals featured local vendors and Texas specialties like pecan pie tartlets, and a rooftop mixer highlighted Austin's cityscape and music culture.

Through music, visual design, food, and regional pride, the theme created a powerful narrative of institutional collaboration and cultural celebration. "Bigger with Texas" wasn't just branding—it was an immersive experience that elevated the event far beyond the expectations of a typical conference.

#### Introduction:

The SEC Housing Officers Conference redefined event hospitality through immersive dining that embodied Texas warmth and pride. Head chefs introduced dishes, and vendors shared ingredient stories, creating a personal, welcoming experience. Every detail reflected the rustic Texas theme—from burnt orange decor and record-inspired color palettes to SEC flags later gifted as mementos. Culinary presentations featured elaborate displays, coordinated aprons, and carefully styled table settings. Each meal, from breakfast to the reception dinner, blended creativity, culture, and design, transforming traditional catering into a memorable, high-touch experience that celebrated the spirit of UT Austin and the Southeastern Conference.

#### Essay:

The SEC Housing Officers Conference redefined hospitality with a service style that reflected true Texas warmth. Head chefs introduced dishes, and local vendors shared ingredient stories, creating a personal, interactive experience that made every guest feel welcomed and valued.

The event embraced a rustic Texas theme through thoughtful design. Burnt orange hues and wood tones inspired by custom vinyl record artwork shaped the space, while 16 SEC university flags hung overhead as symbols of collaboration—later mailed to attendees as personalized keepsakes.

Serving lines became immersive displays, including a cornucopia centerpiece cascading with produce and a “Monsoon Line” decorated with umbrellas. Dishes were plated on wooden planks and gold risers, while staff wore aprons matching each station’s theme. This attention to presentation turned each meal into an edible expression of Texas pride.

Table settings were equally intentional. Breakfast featured black linens, taupe napkins, and rosebud accents. Lunch used sage cloths, dried florals, and rustic wooden elements. The reception dinner featured wooden farm tables, coordinated glassware, and layered decor that tied back to the theme.

From decor to dish delivery, every detail blended creativity, culture, and care—elevating the event into a high-touch, unforgettable experience.

#### Introduction:

The SEC Housing Officers Conference exemplified excellence in event planning, collaboration, and leadership in higher education. Bringing together all 16 SEC universities for the first time, the event fostered meaningful discussions on key challenges while showcasing UT Austin’s hospitality and innovation. The event was executed under budget, emphasizing fiscal responsibility without compromising quality. With a focus on sustainability, inclusivity, and professional development, the conference not only strengthened institutional partnerships but also set a new standard for future SEC gatherings.

#### Essay:

The SEC Housing Officers Conference exemplified thoughtful planning, strategic collaboration, and responsible resource management. With a \$45,000 budget, the event was delivered under budget at \$39,000—demonstrating fiscal responsibility without compromising quality or guest experience.

For the first time, all 16 SEC universities participated, making it a milestone moment for collaboration in housing and dining. The conference facilitated meaningful networking and shared solutions for key challenges, including staffing shortages, student mental health, and operational innovation. UT Austin hosted and led many of these critical conversations while highlighting its own hospitality capabilities and facilities.

Over 100 staff, volunteers, local vendors, and student performers contributed to the event. Inclusive programming, vendor partnerships, and personalized experiences—such as mailing SEC university flags to attendees—fostered a sense of community and institutional pride.

Sustainability was also a key focus. Locally sourced food, reusable glassware and linens, and decor like dried floral arrangements helped reduce waste and align with environmental goals.

The “wow” factor wasn’t just in presentation, but in the spirit of the event—grounded in professional development, cross-institutional collaboration, and a cultural celebration that honored both UT Austin and the broader SEC community.

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