A MODEL RELATIONSHIP

Partnering With Visitors at Academic Museums

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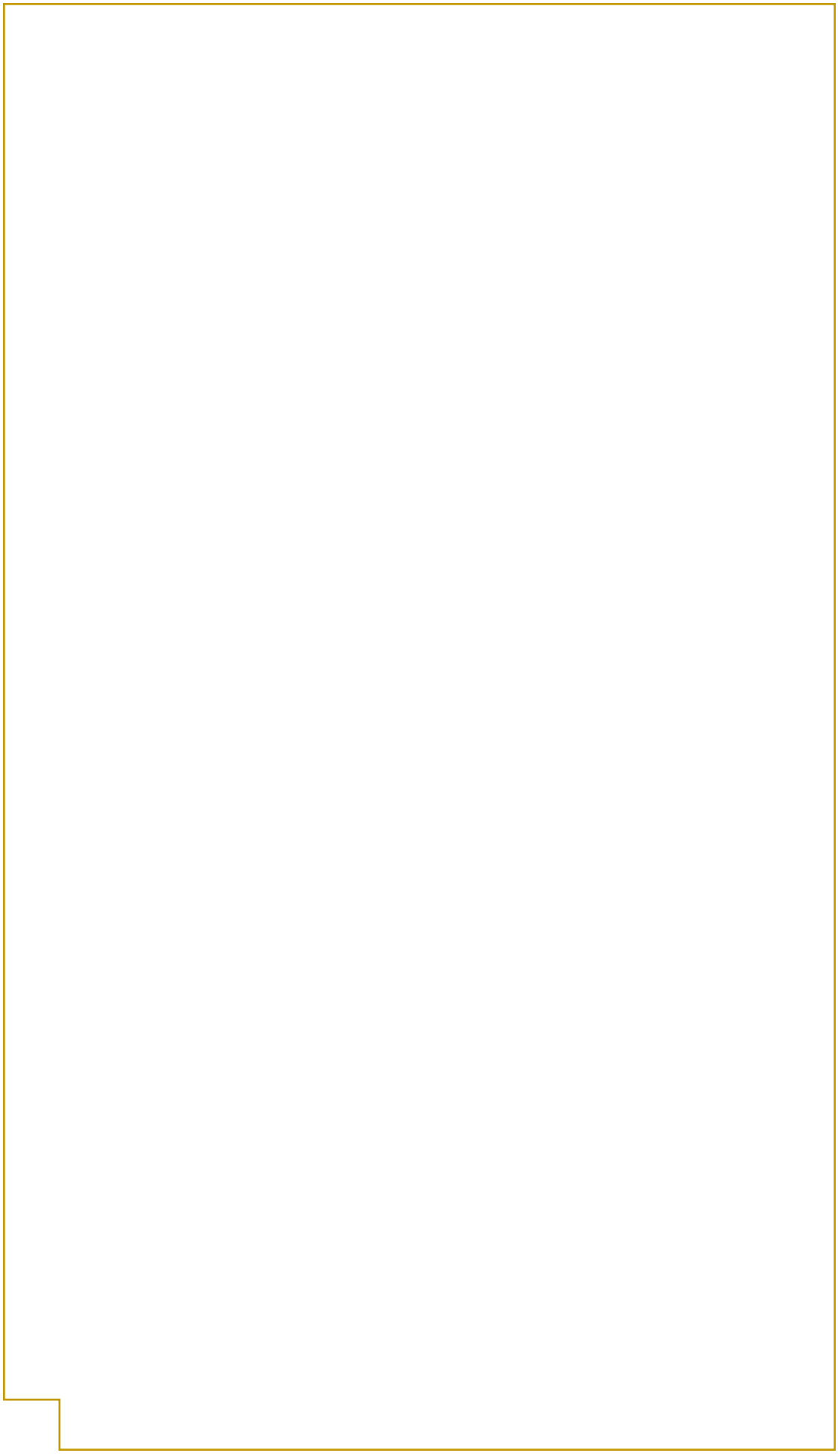

PREFACE

One year ago, in the spring of 2011, I began my thesis with a literature review of the use of new technologies in art museums—two things that are about as far from my wheelhouse as you can get without leaving the museum field altogether. I think my reasoning had something to do with broadening my horizons. A noble impulse? Perhaps. Practical? Not so much.

As you will have noticed, the paper you hold in your hands is about neither art nor technology. How that came to be is a story like any other about the creative process. It consists of mistakes and stall-outs, flashes of insight and sparks of renewed zeal. With the benefit of hindsight, I have been able to distill a few important lessons from the experience. I am committing these lessons to memory, in the hope of saving myself time and frustration in the future.

By the end of last summer, I had pages of notes about apps and interactives, but still no clear idea of what I would propose as the argument of my thesis. Throughout the fall semester, as a specific idea continued to fail to crystallize, the suspicion that I had really screwed up in picking this topic nagged at me more and more insistently. But what could I do, at that point? Again, for reasons that must have made sense at the time (or perhaps just because I'm stubborn), I stuck with it.

In retrospect, my situation at the time illustrates the first three lessons. Number one: Play to your strengths. I knew going in that I would be spending an excruciating amount of time with this topic, and that it had better be one I could embrace. I ignored that knowledge, convinced the novelty would keep me interested. It didn't. Which leads me neatly to lesson number two: Trust your gut. Also something I already knew, but this drove it home in a way that nothing else had. It would have helped, too, if I had remembered lesson number three: Be flexible. I was so worried about the problem that my vision became narrow, rigid, and somewhat obsessive, when what I most needed was to step back, take a deep breath, and embrace some perspective.

My main problem that fall was an embarrassment of ideas: Personalizing the museum by giving visitors opportunities to tailor their own experience. Negative perceptions of museums and how to change them. Different motives for visiting museums. Minorities and museums. Each of these could have made a thesis by itself, but each had also already been "done." I was trying to blend them all into something new, but it just wasn't working. Going into the writing of the final proposal, my thesis was—not to put too fine a point on it—a total mess.

Fortunately, it was about then that I reached the point at which desperation overcomes fear. My thesis topic and I were torturing each other. Fine then. There was nothing for it but to make a clean break. About ten days before the proposal was due, I completely scrapped the idea and started over.

I don't know why this didn't occur to me in the first place (again, tunnel vision), but for a fresh start I went back to the beginning, and the experience that introduced me to this thing called "Museum Studies". When I was a graduate student (the first time) at the University of Chicago, I was studying archaeology, but found myself missing the passion I had felt for it in college. A friend told me about a new opportunity that she thought would revive that spark. It did. The Kipper Family Archaeology Discovery Center, a mock excavation for visitors to participate in, had just opened at the Oriental Institute Museum. In its first year, I helped shape and facilitate programming for school groups, allowing me to share my love of the ancient world in a way that made kids' eyes light up. I realized that a Ph.D. and becoming a curator was not the only path into the museums I had loved since childhood. That experience changed the direction of my career, and ultimately changed the direction of my thesis.

After some frantic research and writing, I produced a document titled At the Foot of the Ivory Tower: Reaching Students and Reaching Out at Academic Museums. The proposal presented two related ideas that have remained central to the thesis: First, I said, academic museums should serve visitors from the community around campus as well as students. It would be good for the community and good for the museum. And

second, the museum could actually serve both student and community audiences by creating programs that brought these two very different groups together.

I held my breath as I sent out the proposal, wondering if I had actually pulled off six months' worth of work in under two weeks, but it proved convincing to a number of distinguished people in the field, who agreed to advise me on the project. Which brings me to lesson number four: It may be frightening to take a risk, but sometimes it's the only thing that can save you. From what I've experienced myself and heard from others over the past two years, I think this applies fairly often in the museum field.

With my committee members secured and a new semester upon me, I began the process of cutting my focus down even further. It was a little easier than the previous round, because this topic had a number of advantages: For one thing, it was close to my heart, which meant I couldn't lose interest in it. My examples, as it turned out, came from natural history and anthropology museums, which I love above all other types of museum. And looking at academic museums, at specific sets of visitors, had certain limits built in, which made it a little easier to eliminate the irrelevant.

Nothing is perfect, however. I soon discovered what the challenges would be. For one thing, there wasn't much literature on academic museum visitors. This was good, since I wanted the project to do more than rehash a tired topic, but finding support for my argument wasn't easy. Ideally, I'd have liked to do more original research with visitors, but that just wasn't possible with the time and resources at my disposal.

By contrast, there were too many articles about so-called "non-traditional" audiences at independent museums. I couldn't possibly cover them comprehensively, and at any rate, I wasn't sure how much they applied to my specific case. I also found the tone of many of these reports to be distastefully patronizing. That was another challenge: how to write about delicate subjects like race and class without putting my foot in my mouth. I know how privileged my perspective is, and I knew I

had to be extra cautious as a result.

I was able to find ways to meet these challenges, however. I did the kinds of original research that were within my power. I surveyed members of the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries through the wonder of the internet. I sent e-mails and made phone calls to conduct interviews with those who were doing this kind of work at their museums. I even took a day trip to New Haven, to meet with an advisor and see the Evolutions program in action. And of course, as I talked to people, as I slowly figured out what exactly I was trying to say, I had to shuffle and re-shuffle my material to achieve a logical flow. If I have succeeded in this endeavor, it is due to the wisdom of my advisors, who were always able to point out the obvious thing I was missing. I had my perspective at last.

I have wished more than once over the last few months that I had started out with academic museums, instead of wasting so much time on that first topic. But I've come to realize that the disparate ideas I had been grappling with before the reboot are actually all addressed in the final analysis of my thesis. This is a lesson that has shown up again and again over the past two years, as seemingly unrelated conversations, readings, and bits of information somehow all become relevant to the task at hand. There is no such thing as a waste of time. For me, that's the beauty of this field: inspiration is around every corner, and opportunities to soak in new knowledge abound.

The most important lesson of all has been a reminder that the process of learning is not linear. It is as cyclical and iterative as the process of developing a story, a paper, an exhibition. The same mistakes always find new ways to catch one unawares, prompting a lot of forehead-smacking, and the determination to remember that next time. Except that next time is in a different context, and the cycle starts all over again. Like anything else, though, practice ingrains good habits. I'm just starting out. I hope that, years from now, I will have made enough mistakes to get into the habit of making fewer of them. It is through this cycle that I will get to know myself as a professional "museum person."

Tamara Leviton
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A grateful shout-out to Rafael Kern and the Monday afternoon EVO kids, for letting me sit in during one of their sessions, and for telling me what it was all about.

Appreciation goes to all the other wonderful professionals in the field who took the time to answer my e-mails, field my questions, and give me the benefit of their experiences.

Finally, I would like to thank Polly--without her, we would be lost.

INTRODUCTION

The Unknown Visitor

In modern museum philosophy, everything begins and ends with the visitor. Understanding that visitor is paramount if the museum wishes to serve him or her, but that can be tricky at a time when the definition of the "museum visitor" is changing. Traditionally, museum visitors tend to be highly educated and from the upper echelons of the socioeconomic hierarchy (Hood 5). Therefore, expanding the definition of the visitor, as many museums are trying to do, requires reaching across lines of class (and often race). The effort to know and engage the new visitor is ongoing in all types of museums, from zoos to art institutes.

Academic museums (museums on the campuses of universities) are lagging behind the rest of the field in this effort, however. These museums make up a significant portion of the museum population in this country: According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the United States has over 2,700 four-year colleges and universities, and their museums and galleries make up a not-insignificant 10% of all American museums (Rosenthal). Yet very little has been published about academic museum visitors.

The history and unique position of academic museums may explain why. Many academic museums (Little), particularly those that deal in artifacts and specimens, were established in the 19th or early 20th century as study collections. While many independent museums that began on the same model have had to open up to a broader public in order to survive, academic museums have been insulated from change to some extent by their privileged relationship to their parent institutions. Until recently, most academic museums were not beholden to their visitors, and had only to continue collecting, preserving, and researching in order to satisfy their universities.

In the current depressed economy, however, academic museums find themselves increasingly required to justify their existence to university administrators in order to receive their share of a shrinking pool of funds (Rosenthal). In order to make a strong case, the academic museum must

show that it has an audience, and that it is doing good things for that audience, things that visitors can't get elsewhere.

As stated above, then, understanding visitors is as essential at academic museums as it is at independent ones—yet, again, visitor identity seems to be a source of confusion for the museum. The lack of comprehensive formal studies of academic museum visitors means that the museums cannot know their current audience very well. Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that academic museums are also unsure of whom their target audience is, although it seems straightforward at first glance. The listserv of the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries (AAMG) is full of postings from professionals at academic museums recounting their experiments and experience with attracting and engaging university students. There have been successes on this front, but the general attitude can still be summed up by a post from Pamela Ambrose, Director of Cultural Affairs at Loyola University Museum of Art in Chicago: "I've talked about the student engagement problem with colleagues. [They] tell me that even when the museum is on campus… it's still like pulling teeth." The listserv suggests two things: that academic museums are only interested in the student audience, and that these museums struggle to bring in this audience.

Other evidence confirms the second point, but muddies the first. Students are the academic museum's most obvious target, and there is no doubt that serving them should be a priority. However, contrary to the appearances of the AAMG listserv, students are merely one priority, not the only priority. This is shown by the results of a survey conducted in support of this thesis in February-March of 2012 (See Appendix A). Asked about the composition of their audience, the 66 respondents (all professionals from museums with membership in AAMG) reported the following:

~ About 20% wanted their museum to attract more students
~ A full 50% responded that their museum just needed more visitors—any visitors
~ About 10% were interested in attracting more visitors from the community around the university

- 13.5% wrote in answers under "other" that combined some or all of the above three responses
- Just 4.5% were satisfied with the current size and demographic composition of their museum's visiting population

These results clearly illustrate the dual visitor problems faced by academic museums: poor attendance, and an ill-defined sense of whom the museum is really for in the modern era.

Survey respondents were also polled about what their museums were doing to try to bring up attendance numbers. To attract students, the most common efforts were:

- Employment of student interns/volunteers (89%)
- Collaboration with faculty to enhance course content with museum visits (86%)
- Creation of special after-hours events incorporating live entertainment and food (79%).

Outreach to the off-campus community included[1]:

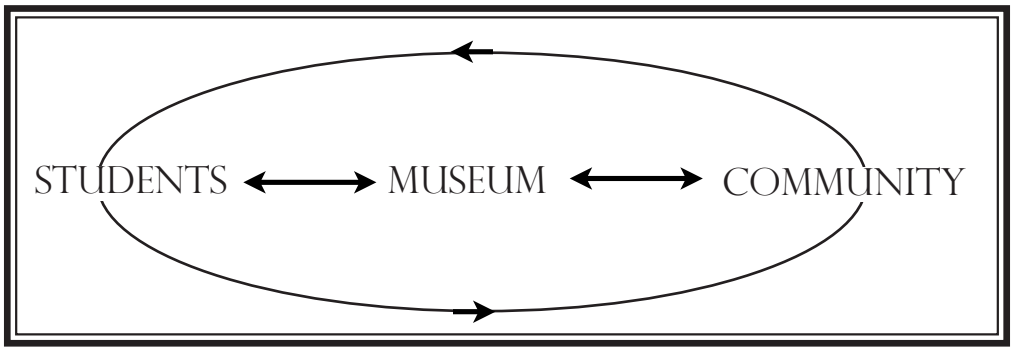
- Advertising off campus (77%)
- Classroom visits or other traveling programs (56%)
- Partnering with community organizations such as social or religious groups (50%)
- Family programming (41%)
- Internships or volunteer opportunities for junior high and high school students (29%)

Clearly, every museum represented by the survey has programs and policies in place that are meant to raise attendance, but again, by the survey respondents' own admission, these efforts do not seem to be having the desired effect. In the case of the non-college community, at least, this may be because, as one respondent expressed it: "Our attempts to involve [the campus community] are very active…but are quite passive for the [off-campus community]. We accept school groups for instance, but we don't go looking for them." Yet 97% of the survey respondents reported that serving the broader community was a part of their museum's mission, and the other 3% said they would support an expanded mission that included the off-campus community. Even if these museums have had some success engaging students, they are still not fulfilling this other major component of their mission.

[1] Admissions promotions were not common, because most of the museums did not charge an entrance fee.

Approach

The purpose of this thesis is to address the difficulties described above by modeling a new way of thinking about visitors at academic museums. In this model, the two audiences that emerge from the preceding analysis—students and community—should be equal, active partners with the museum in making meaning, rather than passive recipients of factual knowledge. Furthermore, the museum should facilitate a partnership between students and community as well. Based on this structure, the model will here be referred to as the Three Partner Approach.



Although the relationships among the three Partners should be equal, each has a different and specific role to play in this approach. The museum provides structure, support, and educational resources. College students bring a variety of skills from diverse disciplines, a keen sense of accountability, and an of-the-moment sensibility to their relationships with museum and community. Members of the community bring their own experiences and a fresh perspective into the museum.

Of course, engaging the public through student facilitators is not a new idea. Independent museums from the Exploratorium in San Francisco to the Free Library of Philadelphia have initiated programs wherein teens or young adults act as mentors for the next generation or interpret exhibits for the public (Little). The Three Partner Approach is different from these efforts in two key ways. First, the focus here is on academic museums, which have unique constraints and opportunities based on their connection with their parent institutions. These museums have a great opportunity in their direct access to the young-adult demographic so coveted by, and elusive for, museums in general. However,

academic museums also have extra burdens due to their position: more layers of administration to navigate in funding and approving new initiatives, and issues of public perception above and beyond those faced by independent museums because of the often fraught relationship between the university and its neighbors. Second, the Three Partner Approach seeks to create an awareness of the importance of relationship-building between museums and their visitors. Museums may unconsciously be following the pattern of the Three Partner Approach in their programs and exhibits, but without a consciousness of the relationship framework. Part of the Approach is the contention that such consciousness is essential to the sustainability of new engagement initiatives, and to permanent change in institutional philosophy.

THE THREE PARTNERS: DEFINITIONS AND CHALLENGES

In order to discuss building effective relationships among the three Partners, it is first necessary to define and understand each of those Partners from many angles: demographics, needs, challenges, responsibilities, and the resources or benefits each brings to the relationship.

Museum

Needs:	*Resources:*	*Responsibilities:*
More visitors	Access to students and faculty	Trust visitors
More visitor data	Objects	Advocate for museum with university
Support from university		

The needs of academic museums have already been defined here: more visitors, a better understanding of both current and potential visitors, and a strong position from which to negotiate support from their parent universities. Resources include the aforementioned access to students, an abundant and relatively inexpensive workforce with a wide variety of skills. Faculty can be another source of expertise not as readily available to independent museums. Above all, the academic museum's strength

lies in its collections. Objects are central to the identity of the museum as distinct from other types of learning institutions, and it should be remembered that exposure to these objects is the defining offering of the museum experience for visitors.

How visitors are exposed to said objects is one of the major challenges for academic museums. Due to history and context, the top-down approach to intellectual authority is even more entrenched at academic museums than in the field at large. Changing this attitude will not be quick or easy, but it is imperative to successful relationship building with the other Partners. Without wholehearted buy-in from a majority of museum staff, as well as from university administration, any new relationships formed with visitors will be on shaky ground, endangered by the threat of a sudden withdrawal of institutional commitment. It is the museum's responsibility to frankly confront potential bias among its own staff, and to advocate with the university on behalf of the museum as a source of constructive action.

In the Three Partner Approach, honest self-examination on the part of the museum is as important as understanding visitors. There has not so far been any formal survey of attitudes toward visitors among museum staff (perhaps an area for future research in connection with this thesis), yet many museum professionals will probably admit privately that they or their colleagues have at times felt negatively toward the visiting public. One suspects that perceptions of visitors as careless, untrustworthy, and foolish are the museum world's biggest dirty little secret. Admitting to this prejudice is the first step in dispelling it. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the fears from which such biases arise, and to address them directly rather than dismissing or dodging them. Any application of the Three Partner Approach should include a clear and specific plan for ensuring the safety of the objects and the preservation of an amenable research environment. In addition, a proponent of the Three Partner Approach should make assurances that any product of the new initiative will be on par with the museum's usual standards, and that the factual integrity and overall exhibition standards of the museum will not be compromised. Furthermore, it should be clear to the visiting public that the source of the new product is a non-

professional group, so that they will not confuse it with the work of the curators and other museum personnel. These provisions should help the dubious feel more comfortable with the idea of sharing some authority and control with the visitor. Over time, evidence of success will also move the gradual acceptance of the new relationships forward.

Getting the university to buy into the Three Partner Approach is a matter of internal marketing. The museum must bring itself to the attention of the school administration, and show how it can help the college with its problems. Many universities suffer from a tense relationship with their neighbors. There are many different reasons for these tensions, based on the demographics and population density of a particular area, and changes to these factors over time. Because of this diversity of situations, no one recommendation will apply to all academic museums. Therefore, this thesis is focused specifically on academic museums at urban universities with underserved communities nearby. As places for informal learning, academic museums can offer a way to connect with and become comfortable in the university environment to people largely denied access to higher education through traditional channels due to their socioeconomic status. By breaking down barriers between the school and the community, the museum can significantly improve relations between the two entities. With the grim economic situation heightening class tensions, the facilitation of free interaction between the academically privileged and the socially underserved is meaningful work, and work that is of significant value to universities.

Students

Needs:	*Resources:*	*Responsibilities:*
"Compelling reason" to visit	Skills and talents	Accountability among Partners
Personal satisfaction	Youthful perspective	
Career advancement		

The Partner group made up of university students is fairly easily defined demographically. In most ways, these students fit the profile of the "traditional" museum audience: middle to upper class and well-educated. The students are atypical of regular museum visitors only in their age; the 18-30 age group is coveted by museums looking to increase and maintain vitality, but can be difficult to capture. A study commissioned by the Penn Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in 2009 sheds light on the reasons for this difficulty. The Museum hired a student organization from the Wharton School of Business, the Social Impact Consulting Group (SIC), to conduct a survey of populations underrepresented in the Museum's visitorship, which included undergraduate and graduate students (6). The researchers asked: if the Museum was not a popular destination among the targeted groups (10), where were they going instead? They found that the cultural destinations most frequented by the surveyed students were lecture series, art museums or galleries, and musical or theatrical performances. What was it about these cultural experiences that made them so appealing? Respondents explained that these types of activities were entertaining, social, and trendy. They also made comments related to accessibility and emotional comfort. The Museum, by contrast (SIC 14), was seen as a highly specialized place requiring a certain amount of previous knowledge to be appreciated. Respondents thought of the Museum as solitary, static, and, above all, time-consuming. It wasn't that their interest in the Museum was zero, respondents told SIC, but their leisure time was so limited that they would need a specific and "compelling reason" to make visiting a priority (11, 20-22). Any successful approach to student engagement must address these issues by altering student perception of the museum and offering them a "compelling reason" to visit.

The Three Partner Approach has a "compelling reason" built in, in that it offers students an opportunity to do public service, in a way that fulfills their expectations for such an experience. A 2009 study at the University of Florida (Gage 35-39) tested student motivations for volunteering through a model called the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI). There are many methods for measuring volunteer motives, but VFI is the most commonly used, in large part because it takes into

account a range of egoistic and altruistic motives, rather than imposing black and white divisions between the two. The VFI method asks participants to rate the importance of six functions of volunteering: Understanding, Social, Values, Protective, Career, and Enhancement. The Understanding function refers to volunteering as a learning experience, with the goal of developing new skills and ways of thinking. The Social function frames volunteering as a group activity done with friends, and/or a way of enhancing social status by performing tasks that are perceived to be important in one's social group. The Values function comes into play when a volunteer opportunity offers the participant a chance to put his or her personal beliefs into action, to accomplish something that he or she deems important. The Protective function is the use of volunteer work to mitigate or escape internal conflicts and stress. The Career function applies in cases where volunteer work offers opportunities to network and improve job opportunities. Finally, the Enhancement function involves volunteering as a path to personal and psychological growth.

In this particular study (Gage 84-85), Values and Understanding were rated of greatest importance, followed by Career and Enhancement. This is consistent with the findings of many similar studies, indicating a mix of altruistic and self-improvement goals among college students. The study participants demonstrated a strong commitment to helping others, but they desired to do so in a way that offered personal satisfaction as well. The sustainability of the relationship between student and museum follows naturally from this understanding of motivations: volunteers are most easily recruited by appealing to their most prominent motivations, are more satisfied with the volunteer experience the more their needs and expectations are fulfilled by it, and are more likely to continue volunteering and expand their volunteer activities the more satisfied that original experience leaves them (Gage 35-39).

The Three Partner Approach creates relationships that fit the criteria rated most important by college students. It offers students an experience where they can personally observe their applied values having tangible effects. The Understanding and Enhancement functions

are also fulfilled, because the dual partnership incorporates aspects of many different fields. Therefore, even if a student is majoring in a subject related to the museum's content, he or she will probably still be learning new skills in other areas, such as leadership, and will be exposed to new concepts in the course of his or her work. Finally, the Three Partner Approach offers students many career-building advantages. The experience will not only be a strong addition to a student's resumé, but can also expose participants to possible career paths they had not previously considered. This is of especial value to students majoring in subjects that offer few career-path options, such as Literature or Classics[2].

Community

Needs:	*Resources:*	*Responsibilities:*
Educational enrichment	Personal experiences	Respect for objects
Equal access to culture	New perspectives	

While "community" is quite a generic term, it is used here to specifically denote underserved populations living in close urban proximity to universities. This Partner group is united by the typical demographics of the "non-museumgoer": lower socioeconomic status, and correspondingly lower levels of education (Hood 8). Yet it would be a mistake to treat this group as monolithic: it includes elementary school children and senior citizens, local leaders and at-risk teens, people who hold menial jobs on campus and those who have no connection at all to the university they live near. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to engaging the whole group. Museums recognize this, and often approach the community through its children. Offering programs that assist struggling families and fill gaps left by inadequate schools is one way that many independent museums have earned the trust of non-traditional audiences, while acclimating a new generation

[2] Author's Note: I can personally attest to this. As a graduate student of archaeology who was not interested in becoming a professor, I was happy to stumble on the field of museum studies through my involvement in one of the programs used as an example in this paper.

to the museum context. Still, these potential visitors are even harder to capture than young adults, which may account for the ambivalence that characterizes how academic museums have heretofore approached them.

The emotional, psychological, and practical barriers keeping the underserved out of museums are well known in the museum field, and are reflected in a 2005 study conducted by the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. 54% of New Haven residents (where Yale University and the Museum are located) are people of color, and the poverty rate in the city is three times the state average (Peabody 9). The study, titled Engaging Our Communities, was a key piece of the Museum's renewed commitment "to transform[ing] community representatives into partners in the life of the Museum, and to position[ing] the Museum's programs to meet the most crucial local needs" (3). The report emphasizes the importance of sustainability to the true success of such an effort:

> Common techniques include: adapting existing offerings…modifying the setting in which audiences experience programs; and promoting activities more effectively to underrepresented communities. While these activities often have a temporary impact and the museum sees a shift in its audience composition, the new visitors rarely become permanent members of general museum audiences. Without follow-through the museum loses its newly acquired audience… To build an ongoing relationship with nontraditional audiences, a museum needs to permanently modify its offerings to meet the needs of these groups… The first step in building these relationships is to discover what the perceptions are for a particular institution. (5-6)

To this end, the researchers collected 790 visitor questionnaires, conducted four focus groups in an underserved area near the museum, and spoke informally to some 25 community leaders, ranging from clergy to aldermen to nonprofit workers, to gather observations and suggestions (10).

As the Museum had predicted, perceptions were an important component of the study results. Visitors generally had high opinions of the Museum and its offerings, and their complaints were mostly about

practical issues with the amenities, which the Museum was already aware of and working to fix (Peabody 12). Non-visitors and community leaders, on the other hand (13), had strong negative associations with the Museum. They expressed intimidation at not knowing how to behave or what to do, or frustration with the lack of interactivity for their children. Practical deterrents like admission prices were also mentioned. However, there were two very strong themes uniting this group of responses that perhaps had more influence on overall attitudes than did the abovementioned concerns. One was that the community was "skeptical about whether the Museum was really committed" to their needs and comfort (13). The study collected many variations on the statement that in a very literal sense, "Yale needs to get up and come out here. Start knocking on doors, meeting the neighbors and shaking hands" (13). Other participants thought the Museum could prove its sincerity by increasing promotion in the community: "Start inviting them to all the events… Then people will not feel [like] you just wanted them there for Martin Luther King Day and that's it" (13).

The other major issue among the study respondents was that the museum lacked relevance to their lives and experiences. As one focus group participant put it, "Those big [dinosaur] bones [have] absolutely nothing to do with me, because my people didn't find it, [sic] you need to show me how that bone connects with me" (Peabody 14). These two issues, trust and relevance, are essential to building successful relationships with the Three Partner Approach. Trust, in particular, is a challenge. Building it is inherently a long-term undertaking; thus the Peabody's emphasis on sustainability over time. To earn the trust of new visitors, a museum must both show, and prove itself deserving of, respect. It must also strive for transparency, in order to gain credibility with skeptical visitors.

Relevance is actually something that community visitors can bring to their relationship with the museum—if the museum will allow it. Fresh perspectives provided by this Partner group can help the museum present its collections in new ways that engage with modern issues.

EXAMPLES

The Three Partner Approach basically consists of two components: the structure of using college students as facilitators, and the concept of relationship-building. There are programs already in place at some academic museums that have one or both of these components in some measure. These programs are useful as models of how the Three Partner Approach could work in actual practice. This section will describe and discuss programs at three academic museums that highlight important ways in which the Three Partner Approach works well, and/or issues to be mindful of in the application of the approach.

The Oriental Institute Museum
Kipper Family Archaeology Discovery Center

This thesis was inspired by a program at The Oriental Institute Museum (OI) at the University of Chicago (U Chicago), which uses student facilitators from the University to introduce elementary school students to the basic concepts of archaeology. This program uses the structure of the Three Partner Approach, and applies the idea of relationship-building to both college students and the community, although so far with more success in the former case than in the latter.

The OI houses a vast collection of artifacts from ancient civilizations all over the Middle East, most excavated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the Institute's pioneering founders. This collection is invaluable to archaeological research, and includes a number of stunning monumental sculptures, but a sleepy, silent atmosphere and a lack of interactivity have kept the Museum from engaging its visitors or building its visitor base.

The Kipper Family Archaeological Discovery Center (KADC) is the centerpiece of recent efforts to change that. Based on an interactive exhibit at the Spertus Museum in downtown Chicago and funded by a private donation, the KADC is a mock archaeological dig where visitors can excavate and handle faithful replicas of actual artifacts on display elsewhere in the Museum.

Due to practical considerations such as staffing, access to the KADC is currently by appointment or during specific events only. The main use of the facility is through a program developed by the Museum for sixth-grade school groups. (Sixth grade is the year Chicago schools cover the ancient world.) The program was structured with two segments: a tour of the Museum and the KADC experience. In the KADC, student facilitators from U Chicago explained the basic principles of archaeology: stratigraphy, artifacts as "clues" to the past, the importance of careful excavation and documentation. This short talk, which invited the class to contribute through open-ended questions, also provided spatial context with a map that showed the areas of the Near and Middle East represented in the OI exhibits, and the ancient cultures that once inhabited those areas. After a brief tutorial on how to use the tools in their "field kits," the children worked in small groups to conduct the excavation. Each artifact was to be documented in their "field notes" as to location, size, etc. They were also asked to jot down impressions about the objects: What material might it be made of? What might it have been used for? What does it remind you of? The facilitators circulated among the groups, smoothing out conflicts and answering questions by encouraging critical thinking. At the end of the "dig," the class reconvened to share impressions and learn about artifacts of interest to the group in more detail. This process was designed to last 50 to 55 minutes. Combined with a tour of similar length, the entire run-time of the program was about two hours, and fit comfortably into the morning half of the school day.

From the outset, U Chicago students were essential to the program, doing research and developing content. In this way, without really intending to, the OI Museum formed a partnership with a small number of students that reflects the authority-sharing ideal of the Three Partner Approach. Furthermore, that one-time partnership has continued and expanded into a sustained relationship between the Museum and the University's students. This is shown by the success of the program (Krucoff) both in recruiting U Chicago students as facilitators, and in retaining them throughout the school year. Another positive indicator was that facilitators were willing to expand their role in the program as it developed. The Museum tour was originally handled by regular

docents, but feedback from the children showed that the tour was not engaging, and did not effectively make the desired connections between the objects on display and the excavation experience. Therefore, the Museum asked the student facilitators to lead the tours instead, which has much improved the responses of visitors. In both cases, the Museum consciously or unconsciously took advantage of the resources brought to the relationship by the students: skills and knowledge, and a more recent familiarity with middle school students' needs than older adults.

Photo Credit: Jessica Caracci

Another sign of success is that student participation in other areas of the Museum (Krucoff) has increased since the introduction of the KADC program in 2008. Through the social connections of the facilitators, other students have become familiar with a variety of opportunities within the Museum. Many students have created their own internships there, in everything from collections management to website design. The Museum has wisely been capitalizing on and encouraging this increase in interest by providing a widening array of options for students. For instance, an accelerated student-docent training course is currently in development, which will bypass the lengthy and intensive traditional course of docent training that had been a deterrent to students in the

past. There is a new emphasis at the Museum on outreach to University faculty as well, in order to coordinate course-enhancing visits. Finally, popular events (such as series of study breaks in the galleries featuring the Indiana Jones movies and free refreshments) have cracked the somber façade of the Museum and have shown students that they are wanted and welcome. Only time and statistical analysis will tell what the cumulative result of all these changes will be, but there are encouraging signs: at last count the OI Museum had 600 new student members.

Photo Credit: Wendy Ennes

Viewed from the perspective of the Three Partner Approach, the OI Museum has been successful at building relationships with students because it has engaged them on their own terms. Programs with relatively low time commitments accommodate students' busy schedules, which makes sustained involvement more convenient for them. Students have received recognition both explicit and implicit for their value to the Museum, bringing them up to the level of partners. Finally, by adjusting its own culture to allow for more playful events

and programming, the Museum has shown students that it is willing to change to meet their needs, an essential gesture of good faith.

The KADC program incorporates another aspect of the Three Partner Approach, in that it was developed as a dialogue between facilitators and participants, thus encouraging a partnership in learning between the two groups. The Museum has also begun to form a relationship with the community through the program, by meeting real needs and by setting up the KADC as a participatory space. The content is directly relevant to participants because it was designed to dovetail with a specific curriculum. The program has earned the confidence of local teachers (Krucoff); many bring a new class each year. In addition to repeat visits, the overall number of classes attending annually seems to be on the rise, despite major cuts suffered by field trips in general in the current financial crisis. Feedback from teachers has emphasized how pleased they are with the level of engagement they see in their classes; often, the children who are normally the most disruptive and inattentive in class are the most enthusiastic participants in the program. Even the adults accompanying a class are often drawn into the excavation, showing that the effectiveness of the program is not limited by age. Other signs of a nascent partnership include a one-time grant of $10,000 from a local business, which covered costs for a teachers' workshop, and for a number of underserved schools to attend the program.

This aspect of the relationship between Museum and community is not yet as fully and sustainably established as it is with teachers and students, however. Consistent efforts (Krucoff) to solicit other grants have met with no success, meaning that the number of underserved schools that are able to take part in the KADC program is limited. U Chicago abuts one of the city's poorest and most troubled neighborhoods, and the cost of the program—$7 per student plus bussing and other fees—is prohibitive for most of the public schools closest to campus. The Museum reserves a small fund for helping these schools defray the costs of attending, but it does not stretch far enough. Fundraising might be more successful if the Museum were to form a closer partnership with advisors in the community as it develops this and other programs. The content of the KADC program is relevant in

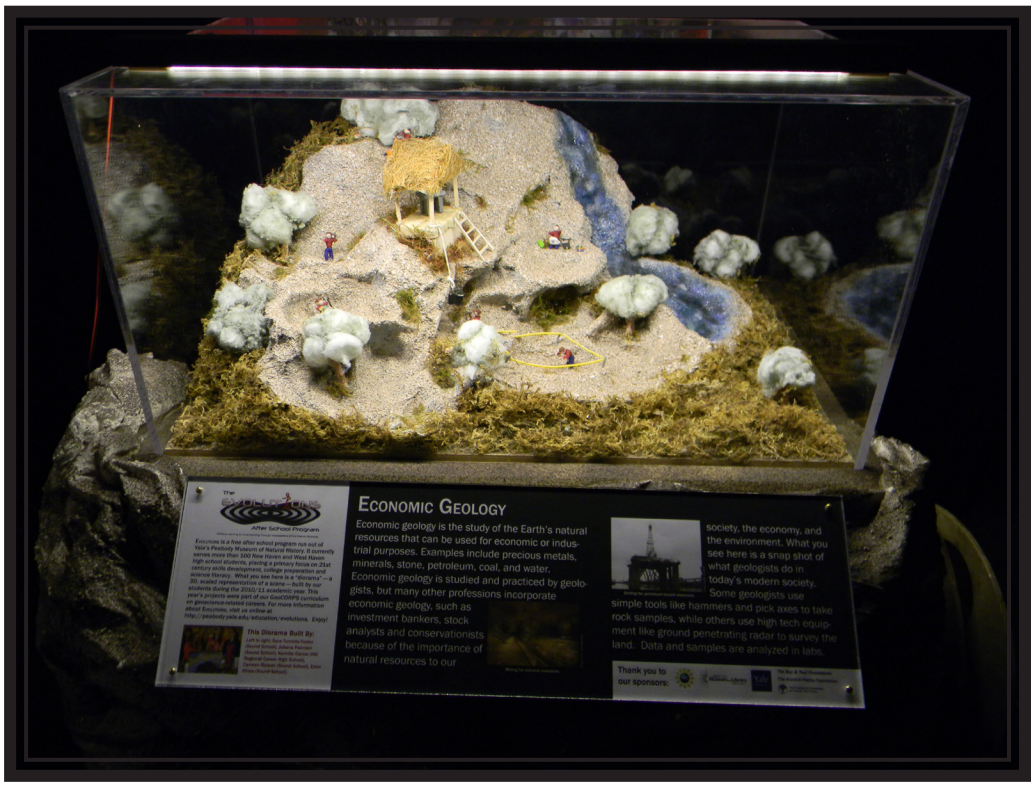
terms of curriculum, but how could the Museum use the program to make the study of ancient civilizations more relevant to contemporary issues? The Museum has the opportunity to form a bridge between what the participants learn in school and what they experience in their own lives. Community leaders could provide advice about what issues to address, and what the participants' real experiences are.

The Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History Evolutions

The Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History's Evolutions program is also structured with the three Partners, but it forms a counterpoint to the KADC example in that the Peabody's relationship with the community is more robust than with students. Evolutions, or "EVO" as it is popularly known (Pickering), is a once-weekly after-school program combining science literacy and college preparation. It was created by the Museum in direct response to feedback gathered by Engaging Our Communities, the study described earlier. The researchers had heard concern consistently from parents, teachers, and politicians they spoke to about where and how high-schoolers spent their after-school hours. Educators at the Peabody felt that the academic museum setting could provide resources and experiences unavailable through other after-school programs. They called upon Yale students to lead EVO meetings, providing attendees with successful role models close to their own age. The Museum's galleries also offered a unique opportunity to publicly recognize the work of EVO participants. One of the projects each session (Kern) is to create exhibits (after some experimentation, dioramas became the established form of these exhibits) that illustrate scientific concepts the attendees find interesting. Recent topics have included the effects of air pollution on global climate, and the forces at work in the Japanese tsunami/nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi. Each session culminates with the installation of the exhibits in one of the Museum's galleries, and an exhibition opening to which friends and family of the participants are invited.

Affiliation with Yale and the Museum provides other resources for EVO members as well. In 2008, the Peabody added new layers to the EVO

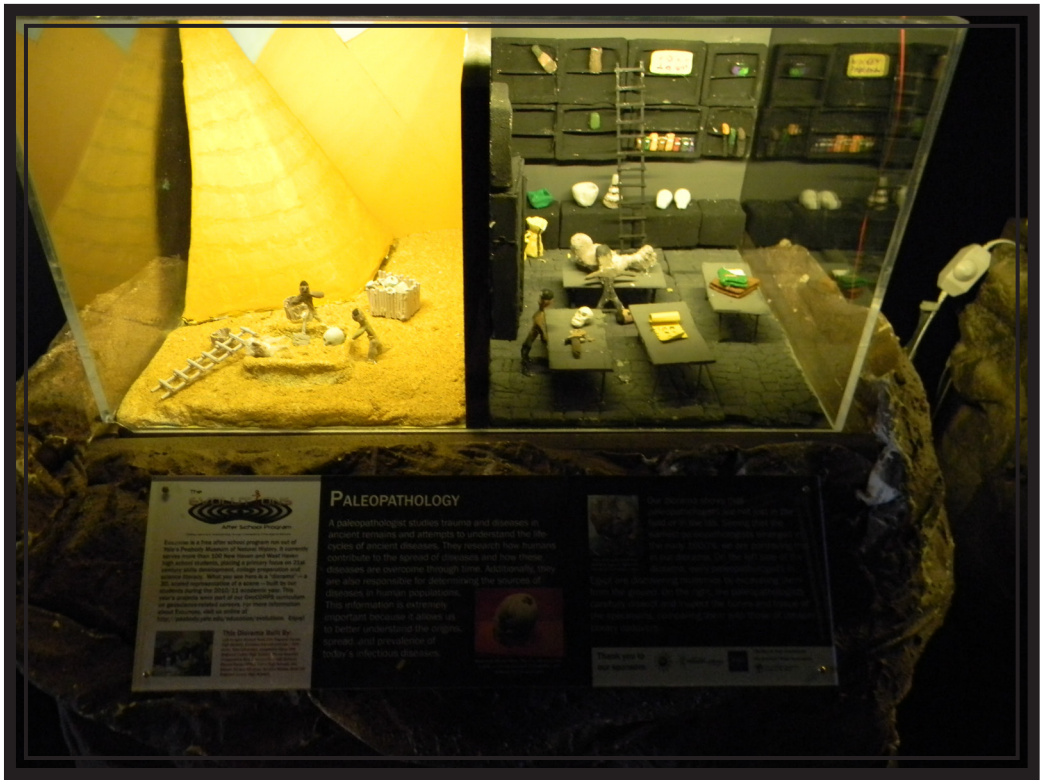
program by introducing SciCORPS ("Yale Internships and…"), a career ladder program offering year-round paid internships in various Museum departments to high-schoolers who performed well in EVO. This became part of a multi-year hierarchy of positions (and corresponding pay) through which EVO participants can now advance. EVO and SciCORPS are also paths to more advanced internships with Yale researchers.
The practical goal of such responsible, hands-on positions is to spark participants' interest in pursuing STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) careers, but the Peabody is also demonstrating its trust in and respect for these young people, which is the basis of a sustainable relationship. The loyalty to these programs of that most skeptical population, teenagers, from week to week and year to year, confirms that this relationship-building has been successful.



The Evolutions program and its offshoots have also won the confidence of the Peabody's adult community partners by setting goals and meeting them. Many EVO participants (Pickering) do not see attending college as either desirable or possible when they enter the program, yet almost all EVO participants to date have in fact gone on to college. The program includes field trips to colleges across the East Coast, and helps the

participants become competitive applicants. A few participants have even ended up at Yale as undergraduates, facilitating the program they once attended.

The Peabody further supported these relationships by securing buy-in from Yale and Museum staff. The University (Pickering) was persuaded to allocate funding and other resources to the program, ensuring stable support for the programs. EVO proponents also accomplished the difficult task of convincing researchers at the Museum and elsewhere on campus to accept high school interns, by anticipating and addressing potential objections. For example, it was emphasized that the EVO leadership would deal with any disciplinary issues, taking the burden off the researcher hosting the intern.



As for the student Partners, there is no doubt that the facilitators are engaged with the program at a deep level, since they run key parts of it with a success that can only come from committed work. As in the KADC example, the once-a-week time demand is reasonable, and the framers of EVO made sure the program would not be in session during students' busiest times at the beginning and end of each

semester (Pickering). The program fulfills the key functions of public service discussed earlier in this paper. However, the facilitators follow a set curriculum, and do not have much opportunity to contribute to the content of the program, nor to expand their participation in the Museum. This is not a problem, since engagement of Yale students in this way is not a goal of EVO. The Peabody is currently focused on its relationships with the community, but if there is a need to address the student population more in the future, issues of content contribution may become central.

The Penn Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology Imagine Africa and Clio

The Penn Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology is also focused primarily on community partnerships at the moment, with the Imagine Africa exhibition and related events and programs. It is instructive to compare this exhibition, which does not involve students from the University, with a student docent program called Clio. Under the rubric of the Three Partner Approach, each is worth analyzing as to structure and relationships.

The Imagine Africa exhibition is an experiment of sorts, inviting community participation at an institution that, until fairly recently, self-identified as primarily an academic institution, designed to serve scholars and researchers (Byrne). Museum staff seized on a planned renovation and reinstallation of the African Gallery as a perfect opportunity to explore how visitor voices could contribute to the process (Schott). It is intended that lessons learned from Imagine Africa will help shape a model for community engagement in new presentations of other galleries in the future (Byrne).

Located in a space that connects with the existing African Gallery, Imagine Africa is a multimedia interactive experience that opened in the fall of 2011, and is slated to run for one year (Byrne). Through a number of media both high- and low-tech, from whiteboards to touch screens, visitors are asked to describe how they "imagine Africa." A number of themes, ranging from politics to fashion, are presented as starting

points, to help visitors frame and express their conceptions of the continent. Selected objects from the collection have temporarily been relocated to the Imagine Africa gallery to illustrate these themes.

The target audience for the exhibition (Byrne) was the large African-American population of West Philadelphia, and the Museum marketed Imagine Africa specifically to this demographic. There were concerns that this would look like pandering, patronization, or—worse—profiling on the part of the Museum, especially as (similarly to many other colleges) the relationship between the University and its neighbors has typically been characterized by mistrust. Community response was, and continues to be, overwhelmingly positive, however. Free Community Days and cultural events related to the exhibition have seen higher-than-expected attendance, and the whiteboards in the gallery have had to be photographed and cleared more often than anticipated because of the number of comments left by visitors. This success is due to the Museum's sincere desire to form lasting partnerships in the community. Consistent with the principles of the Three Partner Approach under discussion here, Imagine Africa addresses community members as equals with valuable insights to contribute, rather than as recipients of the Museum's intellectual beneficence. Furthermore, the Museum intends to sustain this relationship beyond the close of the exhibition, with a continuation of Community Days, and an ongoing partnership with a local high school.

As of this writing, Imagine Africa is still running, and it is unknown what shape the final reinstallation of the African Gallery will take. There is a potential threat to the positive relationship-building efforts of the Museum, in that the exhibition development and design is still essentially a closed process, meaning that community members may feel that their contributions are not reflected in the final result. This could be viewed by the community as a betrayal of trust, and could undermine the relationship with the Museum.

This is a worst-case scenario, and mentioning it is not meant to imply that it would necessarily be appropriate for the Penn Museum to open its exhibition creation process to the public. However, the situation

highlights the importance of sensitively navigating the application of non-professional contributions: they should not end up as mere window-dressing for an exhibition that is essentially traditional in nature. There is something disingenuous about this type of treatment, and audiences cannot help but sense it, and be put off by it.

Photo Credit: Penn Museum

The key to avoiding a result like this is for the museum to provide a structure for visitor response that guides the production of material that will be compatible with the museum's exhibition process; the type of material the museum knows it can use. This is one area in which the methods used for Imagine Africa might need to be adjusted in future efforts of its kind. The Museum has found that the response structure of the exhibition does not help visitors focus enough on the objects in the collection, which will be, after all, the basis of any future incarnation of the African Gallery (Byrne). Visitors' attention is particularly distracted by the multitude of human rights and health issues that Africa suffers from, which seem to eclipse the cultural and historic aspects of the continent in many visitors' minds. Many responses indicate that visitors want to see these modern issues addressed in the new gallery. The Museum

has dealt with difficult social issues in its exhibits (for instance with Righteous Dopefiend, about drug addiction and homelessness in urban America), but the objects in the African collection do not necessarily lend themselves to telling these stories. This disconnect between collections and what is on visitors' minds does not have a one-size-fits-all solution, but it is an issue that must be addressed by any museum hoping to build relationships with the community. Common interests are an important component of any good relationship, but, as reported by the Peabody in Engaging Our Communities, visitors often feel that the museum's interests do not overlap with their own.

Imagine Africa lacks one of the three Partners, but it illustrates many important issues of relationship-building that are fundamental to the Three Partner Approach. The Clio program, by contrast, is ostensibly closer in structure to the Approach, in that it involves students acting as docents and interpreters for the public, but the difficulties faced by the program show that it does not adhere to the underlying concepts under discussion here.

Clio was started in 2009 by two undergraduate Penn students (Olsman) looking for a way to combine their major, Classics, with public service. They knew the Museum had interpretive carts with artifact replicas for visitors to touch and learn about, and envisioned field trips where local schools could come for a program conducted by students of the college that utilized these carts. That vision has yet to be acted upon, however. Currently, participants in Clio interact with the Museum's existing visitors. The students receive training from Museum staff in the use of the carts with children, and go on to create their own gallery tours. This process requires a significant time commitment from students, which has resulted in low recruitment and a high dropout rate. An additional difficulty is leadership. The various activities of the Clio group within the Museum are managed by different staff members, all of whom struggle to find the time to invest in the program, which creates organizational problems (Jensen). Without strong support from a clear command structure, Clio will not be able to undertake the complex effort of liaising with schools and bringing them into the Museum.

Clio is a good example of a program that follows the structure of the Three Partner Approach, but not the spirit. The difficulties faced by the group illustrate many of the essential points made in this paper about building relationships among the three Partners. The biggest roadblock faced by Clio seems to be a lack of operational support from the Museum. With help from the staff, the Clio students could work out a less time-consuming training regimen, develop new methods of recruitment, and ultimately start exploring options for bringing in school groups. Through no fault of their own, however, the staff members supervising the Clio group simply have not had the time to invest in the program. The Museum as a whole needs to integrate Clio into day-to-day life, but so far the institution has indicated by its lack of cohesive support that it is not interested in working with the students. Without the foundation of a strong relationship, the program cannot reach its full potential for benefiting both the students and the Museum.

APPLICATION

Applying the Three Partner Approach in a real museum setting is time-consuming, expensive, and complicated. Hopefully, this thesis has made a strong case for using the Approach despite all that. This section is for brave souls who want to bring a Partner-based program to their museum. The form such a program takes will vary widely depending on the needs and circumstances of the individual museum. However, there are certain questions that will need to be asked no matter what the situation. What follows is a guide for gathering the information necessary to success.

Basic Operations

These are concerns about the day-to-day functionality of the proposed program.

Who will run the program?
This will probably be a curator or educator, but could be someone else.
Related Questions:

Who will liaise with university administration?
Who will supervise the students?
What special skills will be needed to run different parts of the program?
Could faculty be brought in to fill in gaps in expertise within the museum?

What spaces and tools will the program need?
These might include a conference room or classroom, or access to computers.
Related Questions:
Can the museum provide these spaces and tools?
If not, are there other spaces around campus that can fill those needs?
For instance, would it be possible to use campus computer labs, study rooms, workshops, etc.?

How frequently will the program happen or meet?
The program might be weekly or monthlly, and may or may not adhere to the school's schedule.
Related Questions:
Will each meeting build on what was done at the last one, or can participants drop in as they like?

Whose approval will be needed for what?
Depending on the hierarchy at a given museum/university, the person trying to start the program will have to find out whose approval is needed at both institutions.
Related Questions:
Which other staff will the program affect? For instance, how can collections staff be prepared for students' presence behind the scenes?
Does it involve set paths or areas for tours and workspace? Can the museum allot time for collections staff to prepare objects for students ahead of time?
Who will need to approve label copy or other written materials?
How much decision-making authority is it possible to settle on the program coordinator(s), to avoid lengthy approval processes?
How will conflicts with staff or disciplinary problems with participants be addressed and resolved?

Some of these issues could be addressed with regular “check-in” meetings with key staff members. This establishes a reliable pattern for approving materials and new developments, and for airing grievances or concerns.

How will success be measured?
Having concrete evidence of the positive impact of the program will be essential in gaining continued institutional and financial support.
Related Questions:
Can the museum perform its own evaluations, or will it be necessary to bring in outside evaluators?

Museum

Whoever is proposing a new program should do a little soul-searching around the museum, to make sure motivations and resources match up with the ideal concpet of the new initiative.

What is the motivation for implementing this program?
The purpose might be to attract more visitors, more positive attention, or more funds. The reason will shape the outcome, so it is important to be honest about that reason from the beginning.

How does the proposed program fit with the missions of the museum and the university?

How will the program be marketed/promoted to different stakeholders?
This is a question of visual and conceptual identity for the museum.
Related Questions:
What benefits will be emphasized when speaking with the university? With museum staff? With the community?
What kinds of materials will be used to present the public face of the program?

How do staff at the museum view visitors?
If there are misconceptions among the museum’s staff about visitors’ behavior, these should be addressed directly and concretely. This will

help skeptics buy into the new program.

What impact will the program have on the physicality of the museum?
The program could produce new layers of interpretation, or catalyze a change in exhibits.

What does the university need that this program might provide?
Success with the program might result in better community relations, for the university, in positive press, or other benefits. Winning university support for the new program requires familiarity with what the university's needs are.

How do students and community members perceive the museum?
A formal evaluation of these perceptions may not be possible, but there are ways to glean an informal sense of attitudes toward the museum.

What basic things does the museum want participants to understand about museums?
For instance, the program could help visitors understand who decides what is displayed in a museum, and how. Explaining some of the inner workings of the museum will help visitors feel that they are "in the know," and that the museum is committed to transparency.
Related Questions:
Are there parts of the behind-the-scenes work that can be exposed to the public?

How can the museum capitalize on the program to expand knowledge of its other offerings and get visitors involved in other ways?
The program may impact a relatively small number of visitors, but the museum can find ways to propogate that impact to the people in those visitors' lives.

Community

This is information the museum needs to know in order to effectively partner with and serve the community.

What are the greatest needs in the community?
Different communities need different things. Literacy might be of particular concern in one area, while childhood obesity is a problem in another.
Related Questions:
Where could the museum get information about local needs?
Which of these needs can best be filled by the museum?
Why is the museum the right place to meet these needs?

Who is the program for?
Children are a popular audience for new programs, but the museum should consider where the greatest need is in its community, and what age group the program is most appropriate for. For example, senior citizens might be an important group to serve in some areas.

What specific practical constraints will the museum have to work with based on the chosen audience?
Transportation, timing, and mobility needs will be different depending on the audience.
Related Questions:
What is the typical work schedule for adults in the community?
If children are the target, is the program for classroom groups during school hours, or is it an after-school program?

Students

These are questions that need to be addressed in order to form a sustained working relationship with a changing student body. Commitment from student facilitators is essential to the success of a Three Partner program.

What methods will be used to recruit students?
The museum should investigate what methods have been successful for other campus programs.
Related Questions:
When will recruitment take place? Before the school year begins? During orientation?

How will students be compensated, if at all?
Student participants could be paid through work-study, could earn course credit, or could simply be volunteers or interns. Which option is most realistic will depend on the situation.

How much of a time commitment will be required of participating students?
The museum should be aware of especially busy times for students, such as exam weeks, and should try to work around them. Lack of time is a major reason that students drop out of activities, so the museum will benefit from anything that makes the program more convenient for students.

What skills do students have that the museum needs?
This could include graphic design, fabrication, evaluation and statistical analysis, web design, audio/visual creation, and any number of other fields studied on campus.

What skills or other benefits might the museum aim to give students through the program?
Outside of their major fields, students might benefit from practice in collaboration, public speaking, or other widely-applicable skills.

This list can never be complete and definitive, but the questions and suggestions here should help musuem professionals think practically and conceptually about applying the Three Partner Approach. As more programs are created under this rubric, there will be more data for museums to rely on when searching for answers to these questions.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The issue of academic museum visitors is one rich in potential for further investigation. If this thesis project were to be expanded upon, a new survey of academic museum professionals would be needed, asking more targeted questions. Furthermore, it would be necessary to research many more museums, in order to more completely document examples of the Three Partner Approach. Finally, formal research would have to be conducted regarding the experiences of each Partner group in this type of program, in order to quantify the effects of the approach. It is hoped that this thesis will inspire other museum professionals to take up the topic of visitor engagement at academic museums, and build understanding in the field on the unique issues only touched on here.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

This survey is being conducted in support of a master's thesis on university museums; specifically, how they can appeal to both the on-campus student audience and non-traditional audiences in the surrounding community at the same time through object-centered programming. Your input is greatly appreciated.

1) What is your opinion of the visiting audience of your museum?
   a. We need to attract more students!
   b. We need to attract more people from the community around the university.
   c. We need to attract more visitors, period.
   d. I am satisfied with the number and type of visitors we receive.
   e. Other (Please explain)

2) Is it a part of your museum's mission to serve the community surrounding the university?
   Y N

3) If no, would you be in favor of expanding the mission to include a community audience?
   Y N

4) Which of these programs geared toward student involvement are already in place at your museum? (Check all that apply)
   a. Student advisory board
   b. Coordination with faculty on topics relevant to their classes
   c. Student internships or volunteers
   d. Special events or after-hours parties incorporating music, refreshments, etc.
   e. Other (Please describe)
   f. None of the above

5) Which of these programs geared toward community involvement are already in place at your museum? (Check all that apply)

a. Classroom visits or other traveling programs
b. Internships/volunteer opportunities for middle or high school students
c. Family days
d. Admissions promotions
e. Partnership with community groups (churches, social groups, etc.)
f. Advertising in the community
g. Other (Please describe)
h. None of the above

6) On average, how many visitors does your museum receive per year?

< 10,000 10,000-30,000 30,000-50,000 > 50,000

7) What is the setting for your museum/university?

a. Rural
b. Suburban
c. Urban

8) How many other museums are within walking distance of your museum? Do any of them address the same subject as yours? (e.g. If yours is an art museum, is there another art museum nearby?)