

## Epistemic Curiosity and Knowledge in Males, Females, Spanish Speaking and Non-Spanish Speaking Visitors to the Maya Site of Uxmal: A Summative Evaluation

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Uxmal was once the regional capital of a Maya city-state in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Today it is an important tourist attraction, drawing thousands of visitors annually. Prior to the current study, no evaluations of interpretive material or assessment of visitor characteristics had ever taken place at Uxmal. This study was designed to demonstrate the feasibility of conducting evaluations at archeological sites.

The main purposes of the study were to: (1) test visitor knowledge of the Maya; (2) examine epistemic curiosity (curiosity concerned with knowledge gain); (3) assess visitor satisfaction; (4) record general visitor information; and (5) compare the knowledge gain and epistemic curiosity arousal of males, females, Spanish speakers, and English speakers.

### Method

In order to conduct the summative evaluation, three types of measurements were used: a multiple-choice test was used to determine visitor knowledge, and a Likert scale to evaluate epistemic curiosity. Subjects were interviewed to assess visitor satisfaction and uncover visitor characteristics. Observations were also recorded to supplement the data collected.

A simulated pretest-posttest design was used to gather information. Separate subjects were randomly chosen for the pre and post groups. This decreased the amount of effort required by visitors, since they only had to complete one set of measures (pretest or posttest). This design also controlled for most threats to internal and external validity (Koran and Ellis, 1991).

### Results

Results of the study showed a significant increase in visitor knowledge ( $p < .05$ ). Latin American Spanish speakers were the most curious. A correlation was also found between time spent at the ruins and the multiple-choice and Likert scale results. Those who stayed at the ruins longer retained more information, but left less curious. The interview data showed that visitors were dissatisfied with information at the ruins and wanted more in-depth material available. It revealed that 88.8% of tourists had already visited other ruins, and 66.6% of visitors used supplementary material when touring the park.

This project demonstrated the feasibility of conducting evaluations at archaeological sites and provided information useful for remedial evaluation (Screven, 1991). Hopefully this will encourage future studies of archeological sites whose results will contribute to enhancing the educational experience of visitors.

### References

- Koran, J. J., Jr., & Ellis, J. (1991). Research in informal settings: Some reflections on design and methodology. *ILVS Review: A Journal of Visitor Behavior*, 1(2), 67-86.
- Screven, C. G. (1991). Uses of evaluation before, during, and after exhibit design. *ILVS Review: A Journal of Visitor Behavior*, 1(2), 36-66.

Note: This is an abstract of a master's thesis chaired by Dr. John J. Koran, Jr., and conducted by Ms. Susan Fisher.