

The average time in the exhibit was six minutes, ranging from one minute to a high of eighteen minutes. The frequency distribution of time showed a skewed-left pattern, which is typical of these kinds of studies. The "sweep rate index" (SRI) was 167 square feet per minute, among the lowest SRIs ever measured by the NSF-supported Serrell study, "Meta-Analysis of Visitor Time in Exhibitions." (SRI is defined as the square footage of the exhibition divided by the average time visitors spend in the space. The lower the SRI, the more time people spend in the exhibition.)

The exhibit has an introductory panel with label text around the corner at one end and a video at the other end. These items were counted as two elements. The total number of stops visitor could have made was forty-two. The average number was twenty-two; and 59% of the visitors stopped at more than half of the exhibit elements. The distribution bar graph of the number of visitors' stops is bimodal, which indicates that visitors either decided to stop at a few elements (less than ten) or a lot of them (more than thirty). Because of this, few people actually made the average number of stops.

*Prenatal Development* clearly meets two criteria for thorough use suggested by Serrell for measuring and comparing the success of different exhibits; it is among the eleven exhibitions in her sample of 108 that does so. The majority of visitors moved slowly and closely viewed as many specimens as possible. These kinds of behaviors will be sought for the new genetics exhibit. More studies will be done to help guide its development as it provides a new home for the cherished *Prenatal* display.

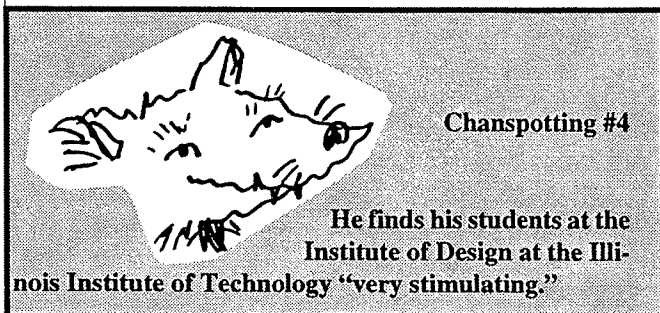
### COMING SOON!!

#### *Visitor Studies: Theory, Research, & Practice, Volume 8, Number 2*

A second issue from the 1995 Visitor Studies Conference is soon to be published. This issue will contain papers from a number of leading professionals including:

Kathleen McLean  
Robert C. Webb  
Margaret M. Ropp  
Carol Saunders & John Scott Foster  
Britt Raphling  
Wendy Calvert  
John Beaver

Eric D. Gyllenhaal, Jeff Hayward, & Janet Kamien  
Linda Hawke & Christina J. Simpson



Chanspotting #4

He finds his students at the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology "very stimulating."

## Two Models of Museum Collaboration: Potential Impacts on Visitor Behaviors

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### Introduction

Museums collaborate with one another in many ways in efforts to improve their visitors' experiences. The two collaborations described below clearly differ from each other in terms of people involved (including museum staff, target audiences, and outside agents) and their interactions (as colleagues, instructors, clients, and vendors). The two groups differ also in both form and function (including organizational framework, formality, services, activities, and outcomes). These two systems may serve other metropolitan museum communities as models for cooperation to enhance visitors' experiences. The point of considering these disparate partnerships together is not to directly mimic either of them, but rather to recognize the wide possible range of options for consortia that may improve the visitor experience.

### Chicago Museum Exhibitors Group (CMEG)

CMEG works to improve the quality of museum exhibits through fostering enhanced professional interaction among all those involved with museum exhibits. The group was founded in 1991 by a loose coalition of museum-based exhibit developers. Its membership list now includes exhibit designers, evaluators, educators, and administrators from museums, zoos, aquaria, etc., as well as other professionals (both independents and those employed by commercial firms) involved with exhibits. CMEG's current membership list stands at around 150 individuals.

CMEG is a classic "grassroots" organization. There are no dues and a minimum of hierarchy. It is run very loosely by a steering committee of ten to fifteen volunteers that meets every few months to suggest possible topics for future meetings, determine interest in special events (e.g., overnight trips to museums outside of Chicago), and discuss matters that impact the group's functioning. One steering committee member, the program coordinator, contacts museum colleagues around the city and arranges the sites and program logistics for upcoming meetings.

CMEG meets more or less monthly at museum venues around the Chicago area, with the host museum usually presenting a brief (15-30 minute) program, often related to one of its own exhibits or particular concerns.

Over the past several years, CMEG meeting topics have included such issues as reviewing signage at a historic house, updating older exhibits in a natural history museum, discussing aspects of museum-contractor relations, using animals in exhibits, and fundraising. A number of meetings have centered on critiquing exhibits at various stages of development. Often, in such cases, the attendees systematically tour through and actively use an exhibit, meeting together after-

wards to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and related observations.

### **CMEG's Impact on Visitor Behavior**

CMEG has undoubtedly shaped visitor experiences in museums around Chicago, though this impact would be hard to quantify. By using this group of museum professionals as, in essence, a focus group of extremely knowledgeable visitors, many host museums have gained valuable input about their institutions. Many meetings have specifically sought feedback on issues relating to visitor use of particular exhibits, often those undergoing initial development or revision. CMEG members bring a great wealth of experience to such tasks and are not shy about offering advice and constructive criticism. The mix of voices in these situations is far richer than most individual museums could generate internally. Host museum staff can see the exhibit through new eyes, perceiving hidden problems, understanding potential difficulties, and receiving suggestions for solutions.

### **Museum Partners of Chicago's Urban Systemic Initiative**

The Museum Partners of Chicago's Urban Systemic Initiative (like the other two dozen USI's around the country, funded by the National Science Foundation) is a fairly tightly organized group with a rather focused agenda, carrying out a well-defined set of activities. The group was organized at the behest of Chicago's public schools as part of their commitment in their USI proposal to include a broad array of stakeholders.

Membership is well defined and limited, with about forty individual representatives from most of Chicago's major museums. The representatives are generally the directors of education departments or the equivalent. The focus of the Museum Partners is to work with USI staff to help the public school students. The Museum Partners carry out this task in large part through offering a museum-based course that familiarizes teachers with the education potential of various museums and helps them more effectively use museums to assist their students' learning.

This first cohort of twenty-seven teachers has recently completed this course, participating in a series of half-day workshops every Saturday over several months. Each workshop is facilitated by education department staff at a different institution and focuses on the offerings of that museum. Teachers take on projects and keep journals of their learning experiences. Participants earn university credit for successful completion of the course.

### **Museum Partners Impact on Visitor Behavior**

Providing teachers with such in-depth information should have a marked effect on their use of museums as educational venues for their classes. It is easy to see how this program could change teachers' use of museums. No longer would they settle for traditional one-shot field trips, but rather they would collaborate with museum staff to develop a coherent educational program for their students, based around one or

more themes or topics, carried out through repeated visits to a museum or museums, and supplemented by other museum education materials.

Early evaluation of the Museum Partners effort has focused on the teachers, rather than on their students. The participant impacts have been very positive, with twenty of the twenty-seven teachers being inspired by this course to pursue further educational opportunities. The course is being offered again, and, hopefully, will include an assessment of subsequent changes in museum use as a teaching tool.

### **Conclusion**

Examining these two models of museum collaboration reveals a wide range of options that may result in enhanced visitor experiences.

Effective cooperative ventures may involve either a specific set of museum representatives who all serve similar roles or may be more loosely organized and include a wide array of persons based on a common interest. Groups may be organized either externally, as by a school system, or be completely self-generated by the involved museum staff. Ventures may have a specific focus that explicitly targets a specific audience, or may, through the serendipitous and synergistic interactions of the group members, impact a wide array of museum visitors.

A common feature of these two efforts is that both involve sharing resources among museums. This sharing involves ideas, people, and programs. Encouraging such interplay among museum professionals creates forums in which they practice their craft alongside colleagues from other institutions. The mixing of cultures and perspectives that results from such sharing contributes a richness that may often translate into improved experiences for visitors.

### **JOB ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Executive Director for a children's museum in Cleveland, Ohio. Candidate must possess: a college degree, experience with not-for-profit organizations, strong knowledge of finance, fundraising and program development, prior experience managing senior staff, funding relations with foundations and corporations, working knowledge in operations, education and marketing.**

**Reply to: Executive Director Search  
Rainbow Children's Museum  
10730 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44106-2200**



*ChanSpotting#5*

Look for him at the zoo—Phoenix Zoo and Lincoln Park Zoo. That is where he is involved in current projects.