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VSA Election Results

In March and early April, members of the Visitor Studies Association participated in the biennial election of officers and board members. We had an excellent slate of candidates and some close vote tallies.

The officers elected for 2-year terms beginning July 1997 are:

- President: Ross Loomis, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO;
- Vice President: Kris Morrissey, Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, MI;
- Secretary: Patricia Shettel, American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC;
- Treasurer: David Simmons, Old Sturbridge Village, Old Sturbridge, MA.

Six board members were elected for 4-year terms beginning July 1997. They are:

- Elaine Beck, NC Historic Sites, Raleigh, NC
- Minda Borun, Franklin Institute Science Museums, Philadelphia, PA
- Conny Graft, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA
- Deborah Perry, Selinda Research Associates, Chicago, IL
- Hermann Schaefer, Haus der Geschichte, Bonn, Germany
- Harris Shettel, Evaluation consultant, Rockville, MD

These new board members will join five other board members who are at the midpoint of their 4-year terms:

- Sandra Bicknell, National Railway Museum, York, UK
- Stephen Bitgood, Jacksonville State University, AL
- Marilyn (Molly) Hood, Hood Associates, Columbus, OH
- Janet Kamien, Franklin Institute Science Museum, Philadelphia, PA
- Doug Worts, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada

The sixth position among the carryover board members was vacated when Dr. Morrissey was elected vice president. The board named Sue Allen of the Exploratorium as her replacement to fill the remainder of her 2-year term.

The new board will be composed of eight persons who are "in house" staff at museums, three independent consultants, and one who works in a university.

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The Exploration Zone at The Field Museum: Front-End Evaluation

Deborah L. Perry and Emily Forland
Selinda Research Associates

This evaluation study examined what Field Museum visitors understand about the scientific research that goes on behind the scenes. Between May and September 1995, we conducted over 125 in-depth interviews with visitors, members, and museum staff, for a total of approximately fifty contact hours with respondents. Following is a brief overview of our primary findings.

1. Visitors seemed to think about what goes on behind-the-scenes at The Field Museum primarily in terms of exhibits rather than the scientific research that is conducted.
2. Most visitors do not think very much or very accurately about the scientific research that goes on. This was not something that most visitors we spoke with were very curious about on their own.
3. Most visitors did not understand that The Field Museum employs a large staff of full-time scientists whose primary role is to conduct research.
4. Visitors tended to think of The Field Museum as dealing with history, cultures, and people rather than as a science museum. They tended to associate science with technology, physics, and chemistry.
5. Visitors tended to underestimate the size of the collections, and to overestimate the percentage of the collection on display. They also tended to overestimate the number of reproductions, and they often wondered if something was real.
6. Visitors demonstrated a wide range of understandings about how the museum acquires its objects. Most of these understandings were reasonable conjectures and grounded in some degree of truth but almost always incomplete.
7. Some scientific and museum terminology was particularly confusing to visitors.
8. Visitors indicated varying amounts of interest in science in their personal lives, but they indicated a number of possible connections with some of the scientist's stories.
9. Having dead animals on display seemed to be a particularly sensitive issue to some visitors. Some visitors indicated that study mounts were more disturbing than more realistic diorama mounts.
10. Visitors shared interesting questions about what goes on behind the scenes, but this needs further research. Most questions focused on exhibits rather than science.