

THE POTENTIAL OF MUSEUM PASS LENDING PROGRAMS AND INFORMAL
LEARNING

BY

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Abstract

This special project will analyze public library museum pass lending programs by collecting data from library websites. Approximately 24 libraries in New England will make up the sample population. Characteristics that will be observed and compared between libraries will include the average distance between each library and the museums it offers passes for and the percentage of museum passes per library from each type of museum. The population of the community served by the library will be described using census data. Recommendations will be written for two public library museum pass programs based on the data from the sample group. The data collected will be valuable to librarians because it will allow them to compare their museum pass lending programs to those of libraries with similar traits. The literature review will focus on informal learning in museums. Pass lending programs will provide access to informal learning opportunities.

Introduction and Overview

Public libraries across the country operate museum pass lending programs. Through a comparison of these programs libraries will be provided with information about what the average museum pass program would be like as well as how pass programs vary based on their milieu. Libraries with existing museum pass programs will be able to use this data for benchmarking to evaluate their programs. It will give them new avenues to pursue in their programs or point out potential problems. Libraries that are intending to start museum pass lending programs will be prevented from making mistakes that have previously been made by other institutions. The data will also serve as a source of inspiration for new ideas.

The research will investigate which museum passes libraries in New England are currently offering through their museum pass lending programs. The passes offered will be compared with the demographics of the community being served. Also, the means of transportation between libraries and museums will be reviewed to make certain that the program is accessible to patrons without cars.

The websites of libraries that are currently operating museum pass lending programs will be reviewed in order to understand how these programs operate in general and to look for unique cases. These websites will be located using PublicLibraries.com and selected using a random number table. About 24 websites will be reviewed. Based on the results of the research, suggestions will be given for new acquisitions of passes for two libraries. A general review of the 24 pass lending programs will also be provided.

There is limited literature available on museum pass lending programs in libraries. The literature that exists relates to new innovations being implemented in specific places. The literature review will focus on how museums support informal learning to highlight how library

museum pass lending programs can expand a library's ability to offer informal learning opportunities.

Significance and Relevance

Library staff will benefit from this research because they will be provided with new suggestions for how to pick museum passes for inclusion in their programs. Libraries with similar demographics and population size could also make use of suggestions provided. Ultimately the communities served by the libraries will benefit from museum passes that better meet their informal learning needs. Museums will benefit because they could also use the data to identify libraries that would use their passes.

Brief Review of Literature

Museum pass lending programs will encourage children and adults to learn in informal settings. Libraries offer a new opportunity for informal learning when they lend museum passes to patrons. Several articles and dissertations support that people become more interested in topics and build on previous knowledge while visiting museums. These articles were located through a search of online indexes. The indexes searched included LISTA: Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts, the Library Literature & Information Science Index, Academic Search Premier, PsychINFO, SocIndex, LISA: Library & Information Science Abstracts, and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index. Each search was begun with "museum AND pass AND program." The next sequence used was "museum AND pass AND lending." Later searches included combinations of the terms "museum," "library," and "informal learning." The term "nonformal education" was also used in searches.

Each article and dissertation has focused on a different aspect of learning in an informal setting. The types of museums used in research include natural history, science, art, and

children's museums. For example, Bamberger and Tal (2008) researched the outcome of fieldtrips to natural history museums on students in grades six through eight. After coding and reviewing the results of interviews with students after the fieldtrips, Bamberger and Tal noted that students had more in-depth learning during the visit if they had positive interactions with guides. Also, the students built on their previous knowledge whether it was gained in school or another setting (Bamberger & Tal 2008). Sperl (2002) also conducted his research, on how families and children interacted in a museum setting, in a natural history museum. His research included both children with and without learning disabilities. In the abstract of his doctoral thesis, Sperl (2002) noted that, "Key findings included significant changes in knowledge and interest from pre-exposure to post-exposure for all children." This could help to support that museums are beneficial for informal learning when combined with other available research such as the dissertation by Holmes. She conducted research on students before and after their fieldtrip to a science museum and noted in her abstract that, "A significant relationship between level of motivation and science achievement was revealed for the exhibit group on delayed posttests" (Holmes, 2003). These dissertations and articles point out possible benefits provided by museum pass lending programs. Children could become more interested in a topic after visiting a museum that they had borrowed the admission pass from a library. In turn, this could lead to increased achievement in that area. Magsamen (2011) writes that museums can be a place where children learn about the arts. Her research looks at the importance of art in the process of learning. She emphasizes that children need to be learning about the arts at home and in their communities because schools might not be providing this type of education (Magsamen, 2011).

Adults also benefit from informal learning in museums. Falk and Needham (2011) found that the Science Center in Los Angeles is "having an important impact on the science literacy of

greater L. A.” Their article provides evidence of informal learning in a museum setting. By providing museum passes, libraries could be giving patrons access to the informal learning that researchers have discussed through their articles.

Some authors feel that libraries should expand their opportunities for informal learning. Lombardo and Carroll reviewed the book *From Lending to Learning: The Development and Extension of Public Libraries*. They wrote that, “The premise of O’Beirne’s thought-provoking book is that the current role of the public library has been defined too narrowly by linking it to the printed book.” They go on to explain that O’Beirne is arguing for public meeting spaces in libraries and virtual services to support formal learning in Great Britain (Lombardo & Carroll, 2011). Perhaps museum pass lending programs could also help provide opportunities for libraries to reach the same goal of supporting informal learning.

Some information was also found that related to new developments in museum pass lending. There is now a system in California that allows patrons to borrow “virtual” passes. Patrons can print passes from home so that they do not need to go to the library before their museum trip (Virtual museum-pass, 2011). This would help to make museum pass programs more efficient because patrons could check out passes on days that the library is closed and there would not be any handling of museum passes by library staff.

Research Methods or Plans for Conducting the Project

Subjects

Research will begin by identifying the 24 libraries that will make up the sample population. These libraries will be selected based on the fact that they have a website listing the museum passes that their program offers. Also, they must be located in New England so that they can be compared more easily.

Instruments

Publiclibraries.com will be used to obtain a list of the public libraries in each of the six New England states. In the event, that the website is not functional or does not list a sufficient number of libraries with museum pass programs another listing will be substituted. A random number table will be used to select the libraries for the sample population. The table that will be used can be found on page 582 of *The Basic Practice of Statistics Second Edition* by David S. Moore (2000). If it is unreasonable for a random sample to be obtained, Google will be used to find the sample.

Data on each pass lending program will be compiled in an Excel spreadsheet. Statistical calculations will be done using Excel and / or a TI-82 graphic calculator. The data for each library program will be found on the respective library's website. Data on the community a library serves will be taken from the Census Bureau website. Google Maps will be used to calculate the driving distance between a library and a museum. The information on the pass lending program at the local library will be taken from the library's brochure, which contains more current information on the pass lending program than its website.

Procedure

When a website is located, some basic calculations will be done from the information listed. The number of museum passes will be totaled. The museum passes available will be coded as an art, history, or science museum, etc. The percentage of museum passes per label per library will then be calculated. The information gleaned from the websites will be entered into an Excel spreadsheet for comparison. Categories for comparison will include population of community served by library, mean household income of community served, average educational level of community served, total number of library passes, percentage of each

museum type, if public transportation is available, and mean and median distances between the library and the museums it has passes for. If possible, it will be noted what age group museum passes are intended for and if museums are wheelchair accessible. The mean and median distances might only be calculated for a smaller sample than all 24 libraries. This will depend on how many passes libraries have. The research will be completed during July and August 2012.

After the data collected on the 24 websites is reviewed, the pass-lending program at a local public library will be reviewed and compared to similar programs. The pass lending program of a second library of a different size will also be analyzed. This second library will be taken from the sample population of 24 libraries.

Suggestions will be made that the two public libraries being analyzed consider acquiring passes within a certain distance of the library and that will give the libraries a balanced selection of passes including museums for a variety of ages, transportation options, and accessibility options. These recommendations will be based on the norms shown in the sample population. Census data can be used to see if the two public libraries being reviewed have passes, which reasonably match their populations based on age, income, and other factors.

Expected Project Results

The results of the research as well as the recommendations written for the two public libraries will be written up into an article. This article will be suitable for publication in a regional periodical or presentation at a conference. An article or presentation will be beneficial to the field of information and library science because at this point there is little literature on museum pass lending programs. When the results this research are shared publicly, libraries that lend museum passes will be able to compare their programs with those run by other libraries.

Library staff members who want to start museum pass lending programs will have statistics to look at in a single location before beginning their programs.

The suggestions written for the two public libraries will be shared with at least one of the libraries that will be reviewed. That local library will be able to view its program in comparison to others and receive some suggestions for passes to acquire and changes to the program. The data, statistics, and suggestions provided could be used by libraries to improve museum pass lending programs or better meet the informal learning needs of the community that they serve.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The literature shows evidence that people learn informally in museum settings. By providing museum passes, library collections are expanding to give patrons more opportunities for informal learning.

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