

**Exploring Art Museum Admissions Policies:
Determining Factors and Trends**

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A Master's Project

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ABSTRACT

This Master's Research Project represents a close examination of trends and a consolidation of determining factors which could inspire museum administrators in decision-making regarding admissions fee policies. Existing literature is fragmented between research that focuses on single issues, statistical reports, and editorial essays. The biases represented through editorials, the availability of certain information, and the natural inclination towards finding oneself in a statistical majority, could lead to the neglect of or improper decisions in admissions fee policies. Through an interpretivist paradigm in qualitative research, this study includes an extensive review of literature complemented by two comparative case studies.

Keywords: accessibility, admissions, earned income, entry fees, mission, museum finances

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Project

Statement of the Problem

Admission fees. To many organizations and their visitors, these words bring to mind the issues of cost, profit and access, especially in a proprietary context. But, nonprofit institutions typically receive revenue from multiple sources, including endowments, grants, and corporate and private donations. So what do admission fees mean for nonprofit institutions, particularly art museums? Unlike the aforementioned sources of income, admission fees account for what is called “earned income,” which also includes membership dues, store sales, and course fees, among other sources. In the United States, art museum general admission fees range from zero (e.g. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland) to \$10 (e.g. Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Portland Art Museum) to \$20 (e.g. Museum of Modern Art in New York). According to the results of a recent survey, the median fee is \$7, and the percentage of operating income which comes from admission fees for art museums is only 6.1% (Merritt, 2006).

It is reasonable to assume that factors in addition to revenue are considered when an art museum determines its admission fees and policies. There are concerns such as accessibility, public mission, and member relations. Although the best admissions policy will have found a balance between all factors, studies generally focus on one issue at a time. Arguments for particular policies are usually made in the form of editorials. And statistics alone

offer little interpretation. The American Association of Museums (2006), a professional organization since 1906, has published a fact sheet on admissions income which highlights current museum admissions policies based on statistics found in their 2006 museum financial survey. However, it does not describe why variations occur. The biases represented through editorials, as well as the availability and usefulness of certain information, could lead to the neglect of or improper decision-making in admissions fee policies. A close examination of trends and a consolidation of determining factors, to be used on a case by case basis, could inspire museum administrators to make new policy decisions.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of the conceptual framework was to identify concepts important to a comprehensive literature review. The framework developed for this study includes two sets of concept clusters which distinguish “museum-issues” from “public-issues” (see Figure 1). The issues are illustrated as if in opposition to one another, pushing against a flexible “gate.” The framework includes a thoroughfare for those forces to meet. The executive director of the USS Constitution Museum, Burt Logan (2005) writes “museums must be willing to listen to their visitors...[management and governance] cannot divine visitor needs and motivation unless they engage their audience in *dialogue*” (p. 2) (emphasis added). In theory, the ‘gate’ could flex and bend in response to the pressures, but the connection is only made through two-way dialogue.

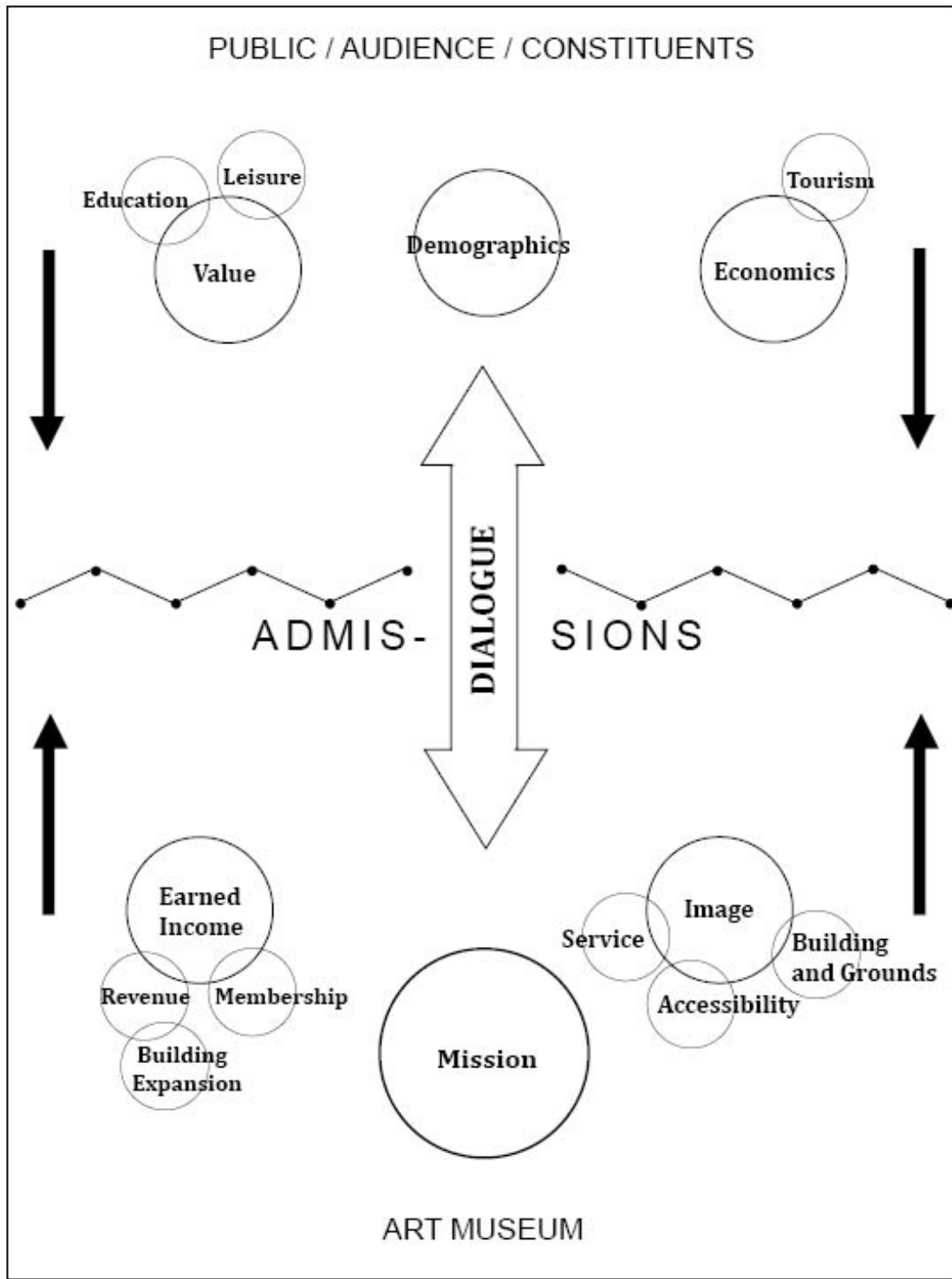


Figure 1: Museum and Public Issues

Chapter 2

Research Methodology and Design

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to present a consolidation of determining factors for art museum administrators to make decisions about admissions policies which represent both their own needs and the interests of their constituents. Factors were identified through extensive literature review, as well as two comparative case studies.

Methodological Paradigm

I approached this research topic through an interpretivist methodology. In agreement with interpretivism, I do not believe in one reality for art museum admissions policies. In interpretive social science, “the features of specific contexts and meanings are essential to understand social meaning...[facts] depend on combinations of specific events with particular people in a social setting” (Neuman, 2006, p. 92). This approach is intuitive for me. I have a preference towards listening, and I easily sympathize with multiple viewpoints. My research design involved contrasting case studies and a broad range of themes represented in the literature review.

Research Questions

The study of art museum admissions policies focused on various issues concerning the museum as an institution and the public. The need to clearly identify the issues and the relationships

between them are what inspired the research subquestions: What are a museum's needs concerning an admissions policy? What are its constituents' needs? What factors to determining an admission policy are generally applicable to all art museums? What determining factors must be made on a case by case basis?

The answers to these questions were intended to serve an exploratory purpose to support the descriptive main research question: How can an art museum determine an admissions fee policy which satisfies both its own needs and the needs of its constituents?

Due to limitations in the study (discussed on page 6), the original scope of inquiry represented in the questions was narrowed to focus on the museum's perspective. Thus the main research question could be rephrased as, "How can an art museum determine an admissions fee policy which satisfies its needs?"

Definitions

For the purposes of this report, the following terms shall be defined as such:

Access, accessibility: Allowing for inclusion in programs, through an emotional and/or psychological experience, not only physical.

Admissions policy: The standard dollar amount required by an individual to enter a museum facility for the purpose of viewing the collection. Also, any discounts, exceptions, or special occasion that changes the standard dollar amount. Most often, this concept is not expressed as a "policy," but as admission fees, admission charges, admissions, general admission, or entrance fees.

Earned income: Income not received by funding sources such as grants, donations, and sponsorships, but by revenue from sources such as admissions fees, membership dues, store sales, facility rental, food service, and course fees.

Social inclusion: Allowing for equal access to all members of society. According to Abram (2005), for museums, this is directed towards people “who have had little experience with museums, ...people who have had disappointing museum experiences...people who can’t speak the language in which the museum programs, people who can’t spare the money for the admission price, or people who have a physical or mental disability” (p. 33).

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the timeframe and subsequent ability to access case study sites. The study had to be completed by June, 2009 (in order to graduate as planned). However, research clearance for data collection from the University of Oregon Office for Protection of Human Subjects was not received until January, 2009, thus limiting the scope of the study. Another limitation is the generalizability of the study. Due to the case-specific interpretivist research paradigm, the results are not generally applicable to any other art museums.

Benefits of the study

This study of the trends and factors determining museum admissions policies adds to available literature by being a comprehensive resource, adding to and synthesizing existing knowledge. Rather than predicting policy outcomes or providing recommendations, it identifies key topics and illustrates admissions policy examples. These factors are presented for the benefit of the

public and art administrators to engage in further research, dialogue, strategic planning, and evaluation of their unique programs and policies.

Research Approach

“Descriptive research focuses on ‘how’ and ‘who’ questions” (Neuman, 2006, p. 35). My main research question, “How can an art museum determine an admissions fee policy which satisfies both its own needs and the needs of its constituents?” is descriptive in nature.

Through the interpretivist approach to social science, qualitative research methods were used, with both descriptive and exploratory purposes. Neuman (2006) confirms that many studies use more than one approach. My research subquestions, which were exploratory in nature, built a foundation by which to “become familiar with the basic facts, setting, and concerns” and “create a general mental picture of conditions” (Neuman, 2006, p. 34). The literature review and overview of case study sites provide the exploratory background for the study.

Strategies of Inquiry

Extensive literature review was paramount to the completion of this research. It was expected that the review of literature would find the majority of documents speaking to admissions policies to be museum-centric in view, even though the conceptual framework demanded a more holistic approach.

Besides the literature review, a major strategy of inquiry used in this research was the case study. “In a case study, the choice between qualitative and quantitative methods is a crucial one” (Verschuren, 2003, p.125). As I was already invested in the idea of qualitative

research with interpretivist methodology, the decision was clear. The holistic nature of a case study was the most appealing. Good qualitative research is used to interpret highly complex social phenomena with rich understanding (MacPherson, Brooker & Ainsworth, 2000; Verschuren, 2003). A case study is more than simple observation and description (Levy, 2008). It is not a simple narrative, and descriptive explanations should be converted to analytic explanations.

In addition to being a holistic approach, the case study was a feasible research method for this project because it does not depend upon a large sample of data. Rather, it is the responsible application of the case study method which increases the validity of a study. The case study “allows the results to be communicated much more easily and directly to the people concerned” (Kyburz-Graber, 2004, p. 53).

This study included the purposive selection of two art museums with many similarities, but with contrasting admissions policies. Semi-structured interviews, financial reports, historical primary documents, and annual reports were sources of data.

Overview of Research Design

In order to identify the needs of an art museum and its public in regard to admissions policies, and to find common themes as well as unique trends, an extensive literature review was completed. However, comparative case studies served to illustrate how two art museums could have determined their unique policies.

Selection of Sites

Two sites of interest for this study were the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) and the Portland Art Museum (PAM) in Portland, Oregon. Both Minneapolis and Portland are in the

most populous metro areas of their respective states, and both cities have the reputation of being progressive, creative cities with active arts communities. Both MIA and PAM are large encyclopedic art museums, and by coincidence, founded within ten years of each other in the late 1800s.

Despite the similarities between the institutions, MIA's and PAM's admissions policies are markedly different. Total operating expenses at MIA were over \$25.5 million at the end of their 2008 fiscal year (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2008), but it has offered daily free admission to its collections for every visitor since 1988. In contrast with free general admission, PAM currently charges general admission of ten dollars per adult. In addition, the executive director of PAM, Brian Ferriso, has recently stated an interest in increasing earned income (Row, 2008). Yet, in April 2008, the Museum's admission fee for children under seventeen was eliminated due to a one million dollar grant from The Gordon D. Sondland and Katherine J. Dorant Foundation (KOIN, 2008). Both MIA and PAM were capable of offering insight through unique circumstances and active dialogue about admissions policies, providing depth to a complex research subject.

Participant Selection

Many of the data sources were public information found via the Internet or public documents published by the institutions. However, semi-structured interviews with selected participants from case study sites provided primary information and opinions. The participants were chosen from the museums' development departments with the assumption that staff members in development are equally versed in their organizations' finances as well as the relationships with their communities.

Recruitment began with networking. During my internship in MIA's development department in the summer of 2008, I conducted several informational interviews in which I asked, "who would be the person to go to discuss MIA's admissions policies?" Networking opportunities at PAM were more limited. However, a research peer engaged in an intensive internship with PAM's development department was able to provide a point of contact. Formal recruitment of all participants began with letters (Appendix C) approved by the University of Oregon Office for the Protection of Human Subjects in January, 2009. The consent of each participant was obtained through the introduction of a formal consent form as approved by the University of Oregon Office for the Protection of Human Subjects (Appendix D).

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments included two forms. The form for the semi-structured interviews provided space for remarks unique to each interview, as well as eight scripted questions (Appendix A). Each interview was conducted via "Skype" Internet phone. For transcription and validation purposes, each interview was recorded and converted to MP3 format using "Pamela" software. The form for documentary data collection included space for remarks unique to each source, a prompt for citation, and organized space for note taking (Appendix B).

Data Collection and Disposition Procedures

Data collection procedures for the case studies included the use of data collection forms and audio recording (see page 19), as permitted by participant consent. All data, regardless of origin, were digitized and stored in the researcher's personal computer, which was password-protected and had installed security measures against viruses and hacking. Once data from the

forms had been digitally transferred, the hard copies were shredded. In addition, when the study was completed, the digital copies were erased.

Coding and Analysis Procedures

Themes were identified in the conceptual framework for this study. However, as research progressed, new themes and thematic structures emerged. Detailed discussions of four themes found in the literature review are discussed in chapter three. Thematic narratives of findings from the case study sites are found in chapters four and five.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Validity is a concern for any research project. This research sought validity in the data collection process through triangulation of sources, including comparative case study sites, and extensive literature review. It is also important to note that this research was not conducted in isolation. Ongoing peer review with fellow researchers, an appointed research advisor, and other professors in the field provided feedback. During the final drafting of the report, each research participant had the opportunity to confirm accuracy in the representation of her interview through a member check. My interviewee from the Portland Art Museum, Lisa Hoffman, also facilitated her member check internally through the Public Relations office.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Summary of AAM Admissions and Revenue Data

The American Association of Museums (AAM) is a professional organization representing American museums of every discipline, as well as their professionals, volunteer staff, and supporters. The nation's leader among museum associations since 1906, AAM currently represents over 15,000 individuals, 3,000 institutions, and 300 corporate members (American Association of Museums, n.d.). The organization maintains many programs, including an extensive website with resources, magazine and book publications, research, and conferences. "AAM's mission is to enhance the value of museums to their communities through leadership, advocacy, and service" (American Association of Museums, n.d., ¶1).

AAM's most recent museum financial survey, which was conducted in 2005 and based on most museums' fiscal years 2004, is published in a 2006 report (Merritt, 2006). This comprehensive report was created from the survey data of 822 museum respondents from all museum disciplines, sizes, governing structures, budgets, and locations. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were AAM members.

Some data include insight into the respondents' funding sources. For example, the average art museum earned 14% of its revenue from government sources, 46% from private sources, 24% from earned income, and 15% from investments. Eighty percent of art museum respondents had an endowment with a median value of \$6,980,475 (Merritt, 2006).

Another interesting set of statistics draws attention to the cost per museum visitor which, when compared to dollars earned per museum visitor, is imbalanced. The median cost per visitor of an art museum was \$37.82 (based on overall operating costs) while the median dollars earned per visitor were \$8.70 (Merritt, 2006).

Specific information about admission fees include the percentage of museums that have an admission fee, how much that fee might be, and how many art museums have discounts or free days. Fifty percent of art museums charged a general admission, 44% did not, and 6% had a suggested admission; the median fee was \$7.00. Despite the number of museums that charge admissions, 96% had discounted admissions and 70% had occasional free days (Merritt, 2006).

In the problem statement for this research project (page 1), I suggest that statistical information regarding admissions lends an incomplete picture. My interpretivist perspective demands a more holistic approach. AAM is clear that the purpose of their survey was for benchmarking and for museums to “learn from the experience of [their] peers” (p. 20). They asserted that there is no one best business model for museums to follow. “It doesn’t exist. Actually, it *can’t* exist. This is because each museum has its own set of circumstances” (p. 19). And when a museum finds a way of doing business that works best for them, it can’t expect to maintain the same level of success without adjusting its business to reflect a changing environment.

Despite the need to customize operations to one’s own circumstances, there are certain business models that seem to work better than others (Merritt, 2006). Through an analysis of their survey results, AAM has found that:

One pattern that is often successful is a well-diversified income mix, balanced between government, private, earned and investment. This is partly because the risk is spread out...By making the museum matter to a greater number of people, it builds a safety net, ensuring that more people are likely to step forward to catch it should it fall" (p. 20).

One set of indicators seeming to guide a museum's likelihood of having diversified income sources is its "organizational history, structure, expectations, and perceptions" (p. 20) as well as the institutional culture.

Pricing

In the United States, admission prices are not consistent between museums, nor does free admission appear to be a reliable trend in the museum industry as a whole. It is difficult to find professional literature which discusses museum pricing strategies, especially alternative pricing, from a practical standpoint. However, an article (Moore, 1995) in *Social Work* addresses pricing as it pertains to human service providers, many of whom work directly with people in financial need. Many of the same principles found in that nonprofit sector could be applied to art museums as well. Moore says, "The price of a service is an integral part of that service. Price can be viewed as a statement of value, a reflection of costs, or a marketing strategy" (p. 473). Specific to nonprofits, "price can be used as an effective means of achieving program goals...[to] reinforce patterns of service utilization, prioritize resource deployment, and pursue other goals relevant to the mission...the revenue production aspect of price may often be secondary to other organizational goals" (p. 473).

Moore (1995) goes on to present creative pricing options for service organizations.

Sliding-fee scales and an annual fee limit are two common strategies. A quick survey of national public and university art museums reveals that sliding-fee scales are not used, except perhaps indirectly through suggested donations, which are not enforced upon admission. Anderson (1998) speculated for the purposes of his study that in art museums, “some voluntary schemes do not seem to be particularly voluntary, except to the thickest skinned of visitors” (p. 186). Patrons may feel too embarrassed or intimidated at the admissions desk to pay anything less than the “suggested” fee. The Art Institute of Chicago (2006, April 19), formerly known to have a *suggested* admission fee of \$12, as of June 3, 2006, changed that *suggested* amount to a *required* amount. In their press release they explain, “the research conducted by the Art Institute of Chicago demonstrates that this change from a suggested to a required admission fee will affect approximately 10% of total visitors. The vast majority of paying visitors to the Art Institute already pay the full admission” (section 3, ¶ 4).

Implementing an annual fee limit is another option, but is probably also rare for museums. The closest realization of this strategy might be through a museum membership that, in exchange for annual member dues, offers a benefit package with unlimited free admission to a normally fee-based entry. To a frugal visitor who regards this as an important benefit, he or she may calculate how many visits per year will effectively “reimburse” their membership price. Any visits beyond that number would be considered “free.” A similar strategy, although technically not an annual fee limit, is a punch card option, which seems to be favored especially by children’s museums. According to their organizational websites, the Gull Wings Children’s Museum (2007) in Oxnard, California offers a twelve-month punch card, and

the WOW World of Wonder Children's Museum (2007) in Lafayette, Colorado offers a ten-visit punch card. Each punch on the card is worth one visit, and the cost of a card is less than the total if each visit were paid for as they occurred.

Moore (1995) says about human service organizations, that "income and other measures of wealth are the most common criteria by which below-cost prices are set" (p. 478). Museums may price their services as free or below the standard charge to reflect the abilities of certain groups to pay. Admission discounts are commonly extended to special populations such as children, students, educators, and seniors.

Pricing can also be a tool that is manipulated to produce certain outcomes. At times, museums have not only attempted to control the number of visitors, but the demographics of their visitation, with pricing. Today, this is most often seen as free admissions implemented with the goal of attracting non-traditional visitors, such as those with less income or less education and exposure to the arts. Even museums that normally have a general admission fee will likely have a weekly "free" day or evening. However, the reverse has also been the case. For example, in 1854 the Natural History Museum of Edinburgh University, a normally "free" museum, for a few days out of the week would charge a small admissions fee in order to inhibit visitation except to those who could pay. They did this "in order to enable students and Men of Science to study the collections without the inconvenience of crowded assemblages of persons" (Edinburgh University Senate as cited in Anderson, 1998, p. 182). Smolensky (1986) explains the history of financing US art museums in relationship to the culture and image of museums at that time:

Price discrimination then [1870 to 1895] probably addressed the political requirement that education of the masses be free, while connoisseurs were asked to pay more than their marginal cost. The arrangement was attractive to most of the avid culture consumers, because they were spared congestion. (p. 767).

A study by Luksetich and Partridge (1997) examined the expected negative relationship between an increase in admission fees and decrease in museum attendance. But, their conclusion was that museum patrons were not price sensitive to admission fees at the time of their study (p. 1558). An additional argument offered by some scholars is that imposing an admissions fee can indirectly and positively affect access. First, Falconer and Blair (2003) explain how the misconceived congruence of free admission and general increased visitation can occur. They say that free admission makes it easier for a single individual to incur repeat visits, rather than several unique individuals initiating a single visit. Thus, an increase in visitation may not be owed to an increase in *visitors*, but an increase in *visits* (emphasis added). This point, to be taken on by visitor studies, is critical in understanding this kind of result. In general, many museum managers who were interviewed by Falconer and Blair favored admission fees and suggested that revenue from admissions provided the funds to improve quality in museum services. One unnamed manager (as cited in Falconer & Blair, 2003) claimed, “charging for services serves to strengthen the museum’s accountability to a paying public” (p. 79). Visitors that pay more will expect more. Earned revenue from admissions can be used to enhance service quality, maintenance, and general operations. In addition, according to Bailey and Falconer (1998), general admission fees can be used to subsidize admissions for low-income groups, expand hours of operation, and expand outreach programs.

Social Inclusion

“Social inclusion” seems to be a fairly new buzz word in the museum industry as the paradigm of collecting and preserving turns towards education and community outreach. Generally defined, social inclusion is the provision of equal access to all members of society. According to Abram (2005), the list of citizens typically excluded from a museum setting includes those “who have had little experience with museums, ...people who have had disappointing museum experiences...people who can’t speak the language in which the museum programs, people who can’t spare the money for the admission price, or people who have a physical or mental disability” (p. 33). In theory, social inclusion not only provides access, but should allow for social change. If these definitions seem too broad or arguable, it is not an exceptional observation. Advocates of social inclusion are often pressed to define the term. “For the cultural sector, the term remains fluid and ambiguous” (Sandell, as cited in Appleton, 2001, p. 1). And a report written by museums involved with social inclusionary policy says, “definitions of social inclusion are problematic...difficult to see and difficult to grasp as a whole...[it is] a fuzzy concept, defined and used variously by government and by different local authorities” (The Group for Large Local Authority Museums, as cited in Appleton, 2001, p. 1). Admissions policies, as fees, in the most superficial sense appeal to the financial sensibilities of potential visitors.

As Great Britain has recently gone through social inclusion policy changes in its National Museums, it may be helpful to compare attitudes and policies of the United States and Great Britain.

Social Inclusion in the United States

The Center for Economic and Policy Research has recently published a working paper on social inclusion in the United States, focusing on poverty as the excluding factor. In regard to an admissions policy, it seems that a focus on poverty is an essential place to begin since admissions, by its most basic definition, implies an exchange of money. Boushey, Fremstad, Gragg and Waller (2007) argue that definitions and attitudes towards poverty in the United States lack dimension. Problems include US poverty guidelines based on lifestyles from the 1950s, blaming the poor for what is perceived as individual shortcomings, supporting silos of poverty-related issues, and thinking of poverty simply as a consequence of a lack of money or employment. Contrary to poverty reduction, social inclusion “incorporates multiple dimensions of well-being...It is achieved when all have the opportunity and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural activities which are considered the social norm” (p. 1).

Social inclusion, as a theory, advances our understanding of poverty and discrimination. However, “social inclusion” as a term can be an effective marketing tool for policy action. Boushey, Fremstad, Gragg and Waller (2007) point out that words such as poverty and discrimination in “our current social policy vocabulary...don’t have the same resonance as in earlier eras. Social inclusion is a new and evocative term that could build understanding among and open the ears of those who have grown weary of problems defined using older terms like poverty” (p. 4). In addition, “social inclusion” brings with it a context that is more universal. Whereas many people might be reluctant to sympathize with a true experience of poverty or discrimination, more people can understand the experience of being excluded.

So how are museums in the United States fostering social inclusion in their programming? Education and exhibition design have been two ways of including other cultures in museums. One only has to look at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as an example of a successful, sensitive and educational institution that adds to the richness of our national and world cultures. But, what about art museums, especially encyclopedic art museums that were born out of the collections of European white men? Sensitive and inclusive exhibition design is a start. However, the impact of an exhibition cannot be realized until the visitor has made his or her way into the museum. How can the art museum lure a more diverse audience through the doors?

The positive impact of arts education on museum visitation has been prevalent in conversations surrounding attendance at arts activities. Perhaps more important than the use of “education” as a marketing tool to distribute information to adults, is the opportunity to preempt an adult’s pattern of non-visitation while he or she is still a child. Childhood is a critical time for educating and nurturing the life-long museum participant. Hood (2004) says, “Generally, *nonparticipants* as children were not socialized into museum going...” (emphasis added) (p. 153). In their “Contextual Model of Learning,” Falk and Dierking (2004) state, “Learning does not respect institutional boundaries. People learn by accumulating understanding over time, from many sources in many different ways” (p.142).

In spite of the probable influence of education, Danielsen (2008), through his research, concludes that the factor of income has the most significant effect on the likeliness of a person visiting a museum in the course of a year. He estimates that one reason for this may be a wealthier person’s ability to pay to sample new experiences regardless of the outcome.

Therefore, if he or she encounters a museum or exhibit and enjoys the experience, he or she is more likely to develop a taste for the art and plan return visits. If Danielsen's conclusions are taken seriously, it would make sense that the key to developing "taste" would be to eliminate museum admissions fees so that a person's income is not a factor when deciding to visit. A case study from the United Kingdom illustrates this strategy and its outcomes.

Social Inclusion in the United Kingdom

Despite unique examples of income-sensitive admissions policies in the United States, much of the context for social inclusion as applied to museums comes through an examination of policies from the United Kingdom. While the working paper from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (Boushey, Fremstad, Gragg and Waller, 2007) critiques the US attitudes towards poverty, it looks to the United Kingdom for examples of best practice in social inclusion programs. "The United Kingdom has a broadly accepted definition of poverty that is tiered and multidimensional" (p. 1). Tlili (2008) agrees, citing the definition of social exclusion by the UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit and providing a summary: "Its definition recognizes the usefulness of 'social exclusion' as a shorthand concept that combines multiple phenomena that are in some way deemed to be signifiers of social dysfunction [i.e. unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty and family breakdown]" (p. 128).

One argument from the cultural sector provides hope for the success of initiatives for social inclusion in art museums. Prior (2005) argues, through a critical reading of Bourdieu, that the "boundaries between the aesthetic and the economic, between art and popular culture" are "eroding" (p. 123). He explains that Bourdieu's sociology of art perception is outdated, that

“certainly, his characterization of the museum as a static and unreflexive upholder of a tightly-bound high culture lacks subtlety and precision” (p. 130). Prior’s optimism for change is motivating, and this is likely the kind of campaign that cultural policy and museum administrators cling to when advocating for the amelioration of social exclusion. So, the question now is, “how to engender that confidence [of those well-versed in what is regarded as ‘high culture’] among visitors who take their bearings from a different cultural or historical compass” (Leahy, 2007, p. 708).

In the early 1990s, many museums in the United Kingdom began charging admissions. But soon the paradigm shift in museum management caused administrators to think more about their audiences and missions, and less about collecting and preserving. As a result, by December of 2001, all admissions fees for national museums and galleries had been eliminated, thanks to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Through the Social Exclusion Unit, a series of Policy Action Teams were set up to work across various areas of government to address the problem of deprivation caused by the exclusion of certain members of society (Fisher, 2006). Policy Action Team 10, focused on the impact of government spending on culture in leisure, the arts, and sports. Discovering best practices would reveal how those who feel most excluded, such as “disaffected” young people and ethnic minorities, could be engaged.

The reason why social inclusion is important in the arts is addressed in a statement by the Policy Action Team 10, as cited in Appleton (2001). “If having nowhere to go and nothing constructive to do is as much a part of living in a distressed community as poor housing or high crime levels, culture and sport provide a good part of the answer to rebuilding a decent quality

of life there” (p. 1). “To this end, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) claims that museums and galleries can '[empower] people to determine their place in the world...[and] play a full part in society'" (The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, as cited in Appleton, 2001, p. 1).

The depth of policy changes is reflected by the intention that the social inclusion impact of museums has been targeted towards three interrelated groups: the individual, the community, and society (Tlili, 2008). In the early summer of 2002, the results of the first national survey since the changes in UK national museum admissions were released by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Visitor numbers had averaged a 62 percent increase, or 2.7 million people, within seven months (Martin, 2002). Towards a goal of social inclusion, however, the statistics lacked the detail and context necessary for a more accurate evaluation. Consequently, an independent research firm, MORI, conducted a study to attempt to answer questions including:

- Did these figures mean there were actually a lot more people visiting museums and galleries, or were the same people visiting more frequently?
- Was the boost in visiting restricted to the national museums and galleries, or were more people visiting museums and galleries generally? (Martin, 2002, p. 3).

MORI's results showed that typically “excluded” groups did show an increase in attendance. However, because all groups of visitors, traditional and not, increased their attendance, the profile of typical museum attendance did not significantly change. Attendance rates were still largely represented by the “traditional” museum visitor (i.e. visitors with higher incomes and with higher education). “It is argued that the explicit concern for equality of access

has alleviated some of the economic and geographical barriers towards participation, but has had little impact on the cultural divides that tend to structure audiences for culture and the arts” (Danielsen, 2008, p. 95). Appleton (2001) agrees, “even the most elaborate system of measuring the impact of social inclusion projects in museums will not solve their essential lack of *raison d’être* outside the agenda of the new elite” (p. 1). Fleming (2002) observes:

Traditionally, museums have not been positioned to contribute to social inclusion for four reasons: who has run them; what they contain; the way they have been run; and what they have been perceived to be for”...”museums have not been democratic, inclusive organizations, but agents of social exclusion, and not by accident but by design (p. 213).

However, it is often argued that many who do not visit museums, even when they are able, lack the inclination to do so. Simply removing technical barriers to accessing a museum may not be enough to engage new visitors. Potential visitors may self-exclude, not because of physical barriers, but perceptual barriers (Tlili, 2008). Leahy (2007) agrees; the motives of many people who do not visit museums may be “a clear decision based on their perception of the reproduction of inequality in the practice of cultural institutions that they choose to avoid” (p. 707).

Additional problems and proposed solutions

In addition to reluctant visitors, are museum staff who cling to traditional roles, undemocratic and exclusive working practices (Sandell, n.d.). Museum professionals are challenged to embrace the shift from collecting and preserving to educating and community

outreach. Some complain that social inclusion policies have contributed to the “dumbing down” of museums. Appleton (2001), using the example of a museum education/art therapy program, writes:

As long as...advocates in the museum think that an individual's self-esteem is being raised, that they are improving their skills or their mental health, it is incidental what activity they are involved in—they could be playing with building bricks or painting a masterpiece. The social inclusion agenda is indifferent to, and even contemptuous of, the activities on which the museum was built. It therefore distorts the very basis of the institution (p. 1).

They, though not alone, grapple with the relationship between culture and social welfare, including both the effects from and causes of social exclusion. Sandell (n.d) recommends that a combination of enforcing and enabling mechanisms are essential for sustained change.

Enforcement, as strong as the definition implies, might not be met with enthusiasm and can have unintended consequences. For example, museum directors became angered when the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport mandated that leading museums meet a 12 percent quota of minority visitors in order to receive full funding (Sandell, n.d.). There was concern that with no profound motivation or social support behind these kinds of enforcement measures, the results will be short-term and have only superficial impact. Tlili (2008) cites Bourdieu as describing the unintended consequences of output-based measure are part of a “structural misunderstanding.” “Museums as organizations, and the organizational actors that populate and constitute them, re-interpret social inclusion in the light of sector- and

organization-specific resources, operational parameters, and professional cultures and priorities” (p. 135). Regardless of who is to blame, when the incentive for funding ceases, attention to minority visitors will dwindle and no fundamental change in museum programming will have occurred. Rather than focusing on filling quotas, leaders should be concerned with the programmatic changes and shifts in attitude that turns a shift in visitor demographics.

Sandell (n.d.) introduces the idea of enabling, to be combined with enforcement, for positive impact. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on the mechanisms of enabling. He briefly mentions the potential leadership of successful museums in the best practices of social inclusion, but does not allude to what those “best practices” might be. He quickly mentions staff “training” as another mechanism, but does not describe his vision of “training.” In fact, he seems to evade the task of suggesting answers, by saying, “no single strategy can be identified to effect such a change [towards social inclusion]” (p.5).

Quite possibly, Sandell (n.d.) is correct that there is no single strategy. Perhaps enabling is a mechanism for change that needs to occur outside of the museum sector. In light of Sandell’s (n.d.) observation that museum professionals are already too exclusive and undemocratic in their programming, it doesn’t make sense that they would be capable of enabling each other. Support has to transcend sector boundaries. Museums can participate in advocacy for social inclusion. Boushey, Fremstad, Gragg, and Waller (2007) speak on behalf of their organizations in the United States: “We want initiatives and a national goal that support policies that cut across issue silos and lead to results—simultaneously and comprehensively” (p.3) and “the social inclusion approach has provided a framework to coordinate initiatives across government agencies, reducing tendencies toward programmatic silos” (p.5).

Coincidentally, the trend towards foundations favoring programmatic initiatives which include partnership and collaboration is another important mechanism of enablement. Cross-sector collaboration and partnering is becoming more common, and sometimes even expected.

Relationships with Other Revenue Sources

The previous section discussed the role of social inclusion in art museums. There exists the socially conscious idea of creating equal access to all through free admissions, but there is also the fiscal motivation of retaining as many sources of revenue as possible. The purpose of this section is to show how the admissions fee has a cause and effect relationship with other sources of revenue.

Membership

Annual museum membership dues in the US begin at around \$40, and feature many benefits including tax deductions for the individual, invitations to special events, newsletters, and discounts to the museum's gift shop and café. Often, for a museum with a general admission charge, receiving free admission is a featured membership benefit. One could draw the conclusion that when a museum never charges an entry fee, it is not able to offer free admission as a primary benefit, thus causing a decline in memberships. In fact, many professionals assert this opinion. McFelter (2007) in *Museum News* writes, "Museums that do not charge a general admission fee usually have much smaller membership programs. Because a yearly membership charge typically includes reduced or free entry to the museum, this becomes an attractive incentive for membership purchases" (p. 63). In response to an increase in admissions at the Chicago Institute of Arts, Artner (2009) wrote a synopsis on the admissions history of the Institute. In his commentary, which included interviews with the director of

public affairs and former Institute director, Arnter concluded, “Higher [admissions] fees encourage people to become members. That seems agreeable to everyone” (¶ 8).

The particular authors cited here do not go on to substantiate their claims, and indeed this appears to be a widespread problem in literature regarding the effects of museum admissions policies on membership programs. Glynn, Bhattacharya, and Hayagreeva (1996) conducted a study on art museum membership based on the premise that tangible benefits of membership such as free admission do not offer a complete explanation for the motivation to purchase a membership. While their study focuses on cultural distinction and enhancing one’s self-esteem as motivators towards membership, their data discredit the idea that membership is primarily used as an economic incentive for patrons wishing to visit the museum. The results of a survey, where the average respondent had been a museum member for eight years, showed that nearly all members had visited the museum once in twelve months, but that only 44% had visited more than three times, and only 18.7% had visited six or more times. In conclusion, the researchers state, “Our results clearly show, however, that a large portion of the member population do not visit the museum frequently, and that their reasons for being members may be more psychological in nature” (p. 272).

Glynn, Bhattacharya, and Hayagreeva (1996) do not comment on the generalizability of the results of their study cited above. Cases can be cited that contradict their results. The executive director of the San Jose Museum of Art disclosed that after its admissions fee was removed in 2001, “Membership initially stalled, and then began to drop” (Daniel Keegan, as cited in McFelter, 2007, p. 65).

Both the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Walters Art Museum initially experienced a decrease in annual membership when free admissions were offered (Jensen, 2007). However, memberships slowly increased as marketing strategies were adapted. Also, after it dropped its admissions fees, the USS Constitution Museum experienced a 62% increase in voluntary donations, a positive relationship with its 326% increase in visitation (Logan, 2005). This was an important discovery for the museum, since for years while it charged admissions without success, it had taken a “museum-centric” approach to attracting visitors through everything from placing colorful flags near the entrance to offers of free coffee (Logan, 2005).

Earned Income: The museum shop and café

Two popular sources of earned income for museums are the gift shop and café. With the exception of off-site stores, internet sales, and stores and cafés that are located outside of the admissions area, the typical gift shop and café are places where patrons spend discretionary amounts of money in conjunction with their visits to the museum galleries. The assumption here might be that when free admission creates an increase in visitation, more people will visit the gift shops and cafés, creating an increase in revenue. However, literature offers conflicting evidence.

Some sources claim that an increase in visitation does not positively correspond with an increase in on-site spending. An independent research firm conducted a study within a year after national museums in Great Britain were made free of admission fees in 2001 (Martin, 2002). Despite a significant increase in visitation due to the elimination of admission fees, visitors were not significantly increasing their spending in shops and cafés. In a survey, only 10% of respondents claimed that they “tend to spend more in museum gallery shops because entry

is free” (p. 12, Figure 1.7) and only 8% claimed they “tend to spend more on food and drink in museum/gallery restaurants/cafes because entry is free” (p. 12, Figure 1.7). Martin suggests that “for many people it seems that perhaps ‘free entry’ equates to a ‘free trip’ altogether” (p. 11). This statement resonates with another made by the executive director of the San Jose Museum of Art, “We think that something psychological goes on. When people know they don’t have to open their wallets to get in, oftentimes they won’t open them at all” (Daniel Keegan, as cited in McFelter, 2007).

Steiner (1997) published an oft-cited study that included quantitative analysis on the financial effects of an additional free day on a museum that normally charged admissions. It was found that “free day” visitors spent less per person than visitors on days which required general admission. Factoring other financial considerations such as operations costs, it was concluded that from an income-maximizing perspective, it did not make sense for the museum to add a free day.

Contradicting the results of the Steiner (1997) and Martin (2002) studies, the results of Lampi’s (2009) study show a decrease in museum shop revenues after the imposition of an admissions fee. The Museum of World Culture in Sweden had free admission since opening on January 1, 2005, but implemented an admission fee on January 1, 2007. As a result, during 2007, revenues from the museum shop decreased about 30%.

Executive Director Burt Logan (2005) of the USS Constitution Museum in Boston told the story in great detail about how the museum coped with consistent low visitation numbers. He cited a complex set of problems identified with low visitation, including an admission fee that had been enforced since the museum’s incorporation in 1972. Only after staff had attempted to

resolve other problems, did the board finally agree to try eliminating admissions in 1997. The results were astounding. Visitation increased significantly, and total revenues rose. The board had estimated that eliminating admissions would create a \$200,000 loss in revenue that would have to be replaced by an increase in gift shop gross revenue and free-will donations up to \$1.3 million. The result surpassed estimations with an increase of over \$1.5 million in the first year.

Government, Corporate, and Private Support

One important relationship between admission fees and other sources of revenue is that with outside sources (i.e. government, corporate, and private support). It can be assumed that when a donor is aware that a museum is receiving substantial support from another source, that the donor will not be motivated to contribute. At the same time, another assumption may be made (especially by those familiar with fundraising), that money can beget more money. That is, when a donor knows that the museum is receiving significant support from one source, that the donor may be assured that the museum is worthy of their additional support.

It would benefit the arts administrator to understand possible relationships between admissions and government, corporate, and private support. For example, the case of the USS Constitution Museum included a rich description of an analysis of its audience (Logan, 2005). They observed that educating visitors on the fact that the museum was not federally supported did not motivate them to pay an admissions fee. Anderson (1998) commented on the motivation of grant makers in regard to admissions. Anderson suspected that in the United Kingdom, abandonment of free admission policies would lead to a chain reaction of decreased attendance numbers, which in turn would disinterest grant makers. Similarly, Gurian (2005),

offers the opinion that the case for government assistance to US museums cannot be justified while admission fees are in place.

Hughes and Luksetich (1999) deeply delve into the relationships between funding sources. Having identified a gap in research about this subject, they proposed to identify trade-offs in, and multiplier effects of, various funding sources for US history and art museums. The empirical results of their study showed three significant factors in determining *federal* support of art museums: local government support, value of the collection, and age of the museum. Local government support had a small negative influence on federal support, suggesting there may be a trade-off between the two.

State support was influenced by two factors: local government support and expenditures in museum development and membership (Hughes and Luksetich, 1999). There was a positive relationship between development expenditures, but a negative relationship with local government support, suggesting a trade-off between the two.

Local government support was influenced by three factors: state support, attendance, and development expenditures (Hughes and Luksetich, 1999). The trade-off between state and local support is again shown by a negative relationship. However, development expenditures and local government support share a positive relationship. Also, attendance, here, has a positive effect.

Private giving is stimulated by federal funding, decreases with state support, and is complementary to local support (Hughes and Luksetich, 1999).

Finally, *earned income* (which includes admissions) is increased primarily with private and local support and investment income (Hughes and Luksetich, 1999). "There is no evidence

that earned income is a direct substitute for public funding” (p. 32). The conclusion stated was that a decrease in federal support would have a more severe multiplier effect on art museums (than history museums) with major impact on private contributions and secondary impact on earned income. The recommendation is to attempt to replace federal support with increased private contributions and earned income.

On average, earned income comprises only about a quarter of the total annual revenue for an art museum, and admissions revenues comprise only about six percent (Merritt, 2006). However, the relationships of admissions with other revenue sources are complex. Further, holistic evaluations of these relationships are needed.

Tourism

Tourism presents a likely target audience and operational goals for large urban museums. According to the American Association of Museums, the median admissions fee of US art museums is \$7 (Merritt, 2006). Examples of higher-than-average general admissions prices of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York at \$20 and the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) at \$18 can make one wonder if it is tourism or a certain level of fame that merits a higher charge. In the mission statements found on their respective websites, MOMA (2009) mentions its international audience while AIC (2009b) mentions its international significance. Regardless of their missions, both are renowned museums and attractive destinations for tourists. There are unique characteristics of these destination-museums that may influence decisions regarding admissions. Frey (1998) offers a comprehensive description of the “superstar” museum, the characteristics of which will become a basis for discussion in this section.

Three characteristics of a superstar museum refer specifically to its prominence among tourists. One characteristic is its world fame. Superstar museums will be noted in internationally published guidebooks and by tour operators. The second characteristic is having a collection of works by well-known artists, such as Picasso or Van Gogh. The third characteristic is having exceptional architecture. Consider the popularity, and controversy, behind the proliferation of Frank Gehry's museums and museums by other notable architects (Frey, 1998). Aldersey-Williams (2006) reports that Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin "is so powerful as an architectural statement that it was opened to the public first as an empty shell, so that it could be appreciated as a spatial experience long before exhibits were installed" (¶4).

An additional characteristic of a superstar museum is its ability to attract a large number of visitors (Frey, 1998). In addition to their prominence, drawing large attendance figures, "superstar art museums are able to exploit fully the economies of scale in reaching out to a large number of people" (p. 118). These museums are able to afford the set-up costs of technologically advanced means of attracting visitors, such as interactive websites, and virtual exhibitions. Through such efforts, these major museums are able to continually improve their scope and quality.

The final characteristic of a superstar museum is the prevalent commercialization of services, realized especially through gift shops and restaurants, which are becoming increasingly varied, specialized, and luxurious (Frey, 1998). The needs of tourists in their museum experiences are likely to be different from those of local constituents. The objective of a museum that recognizes a significant nonlocal constituency is not to attempt to contribute to

a deep-seated sense of identity with the museum, but to foster a satisfying leisure experience (O'Hagan, 1995). Such efforts are leading the competition for leisure activities by providing a total "experience" at the museum, as well as increasing the capacity for earned income.

O'Hagan (1995) argues that in light of a purpose towards tourism, museums would be amiss to not charge an admissions fee.

So what is the financial significance of a museum which operates in response to a tourist audience versus a local community audience? Despite the commentary in the popular media surrounding, for example, the controversial \$20 general admission fee to the MOMA, their admissions charges are not widely discussed in academic or professional literature. AIC (2009a) comments on their own admissions policy in regard to its effects on the local community. "We are proud that certain members of the community...never pay an admission fee. The recent restructuring of our membership program has also made the museum more inclusive...In addition, we have expanded opportunities for the general public to visit us free of charge" (§13).

The Hermitage Museum in Russia has approached the case of admissions and tourism by implementing a dual-pricing system. At the time of publication, Richardson (2003) reported that the entrance fee was 300 rubles for "individuals" (i.e. tourists) whereas for Russian citizens it was only 15 rubles. Calling it price discrimination, Richardson quotes one Russian businessman's attempt to explain the logic in other terms: "we are charging a normal price to foreigners, but offering a special discount to domestic firms" (§ 20). Richardson's opinion is that most tourists will pay the higher fees without argument because they are "more interested in a hassle-free trip than in saving a few bucks on museum admissions" (§ 19).

The examples of admissions policies at AIC and the Hermitage help to illustrate the differences in price elasticity and demand between local communities and tourists. Price elasticity, that is the reaction to changes in price, is greater for locals than for tourists (Anderson, 1998). Also, the demand by tourists for “quality” products and experiences are so great that they are generally unwilling to substitute a lesser product, even when offered at a better price (Frey, 1998). For example, tourist visitors may be more willing to pay a higher price and spend their precious leisure time to view masterpieces rather than lesser-known works from the same period.

The issue of demand brings about the pressure of competition. For example, the USS Constitution Museum in Boston found its major competition to be the actual ship by the same name with which it shared park space. The vessel was a tourist attraction and overshadowed the museum for visitors (Logan, 2005). The museum administration found that because of this arrangement, their admissions fees were a barrier to visitation because potential visitors were not willing to “risk” the cost of a compromise to their leisure time. Visitors worried about making the most of their time, being able to catch the next trolley, or disrupting their itinerary.

It seems that for tourist-centered museums, the reaction to competition has little to do with admissions pricing, but more to do with finding ways to make the museum “special.” Earlier, the museums’ “needs” for sophistication and a larger variety of amenities was discussed, as was the recruitment of prominent architects for spectacular new buildings and additions. Hosting blockbuster exhibitions is another way in which major museums are competing for attendance. Blockbuster exhibitions are usually traveling exhibits which harness much power from the popularity and aura of certain artworks, or artists, and sensationalism.

Examples of a blockbuster exhibit would be a Van Gogh retrospective (who has not heard of Van Gogh?) or “Body Worlds 3”. The director of the Center for the History of Medicine at the University of Michigan is quoted to having said about the latter show, “It’s about the money. This is an extraordinarily successful entertainment show” (Hartnett, 2007, June 15, p. 1). Indeed, blockbuster shows are money-makers, and they are consistent with the idea of heightened commercialism that characterizes superstar museums. With blockbuster exhibitions, there are various marketing schemes, exhibition-related merchandise in the museum shops, and special admissions fees, all profiting from increased visitation (Leahy, 2007).

The tourist-centered museum is undoubtedly a unique type of museum, but it can be observed that even smaller, local art museums are increasingly finding themselves in similar competitive circumstances. For example, the building for Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum on the campus of the University of Minnesota was designed by Frank Gehry and is claimed to be “an important architecture achievement [that] has become a landmark for the University of Minnesota and the Twin Cities” (Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, 2004, ¶ 2). Smaller museums interested in increasing visitor numbers pursue blockbuster exhibitions as a way to increase admissions revenue. And the pressure to introduce technology to the museum in exhibitions, programs, and marketing is ever-present. At minimum, a small museum will have an informational website, but will be constantly reaching to keep pace with changing technology. Additional research is necessary to clearly define the relationships between the extremes of superstar museums and small art museums. Here only loose connections may be made. However, the effects of tourism on art museum operations are important to note.

The case study summaries subsequent to this chapter illustrate how two museums, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Portland Art Museum, have worked with their unique circumstances to determine admissions policies which best suit their needs.

Chapter 4

Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Introduction

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) was purposively selected for one of two case studies because of its relatively long and successful history of implementing a free general admissions policy. Extensive data were collected from primary and secondary document sources. The other data source, a semi-structured interview, was conducted with MIA's grants specialist, Elisabeth Brandt. The purpose of the following historical overview and profile of MIA is to provide description which lends to an intimate feel for the setting and reduces the temptation to generalize the findings to another museum.

Historical Overview

According to a history compiled by the staff at the Minneapolis Public Library (2001), MIA was created in reaction to the 1878 Minnesota State Fair in Minneapolis. There was no fine art exhibited at the fair, so later in the same year, an exhibit of over fifty oil paintings was arranged. It was not until 1883 that a group called the Minneapolis Society of Fine Art met for the first time. Supporting events quickly developed, including the opening of the Minneapolis School of Fine Art in 1886, a move to the Minneapolis Public Library in 1889, then a move in 1914 to MIA's current home. The original building, designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White features a neoclassical façade, in a design now typically associated with an encyclopedic museum. In 1974, the minimalist addition of Japanese architect Kenzo Tange

enhanced the facilities, and the exhibition space was expanded once again in 2006 with the Target Wing, designed by Michael Graves.

The building of the Target Wing was a result of MIA's most recent capital campaign. The "Bring Art to Life" campaign began as part of a strategic plan that was conceived around 1992 (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007b). Self-proclaimed "one of the most important encyclopedic art museums in the nation" (¶1), the MIA board saw a need to renovate, expand, and add to acquisitions endowments. A \$100 million dollar goal was set, and was exceeded with a total of \$103.2 million from 2,100 donors (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007a). The lead gift of \$10 million was from Minneapolis-based company, the Target Corporation, with which MIA has had a long relationship. Eight community leaders followed with gifts of at least \$2 million each (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007b). Corporate support and foundations contributing more than \$1 million each were: the James Ford Bell Foundation, Best Buy Children's Foundation, General Mills Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Carl & Eloise Pohlاد Family Foundation, Star Tribune Foundation, and U.S. Bankcorp Foundation. Museum trustees expressed their support through a total of \$47.5 million in contributions. The results of the campaign were that 77% of funding came from individuals, while no government funding was received.

As a result of the successful campaign, the museum was renovated, 78 permanent art endowments totaling \$50 million were created, and the Target Wing was added. In one report, MIA had not originally desired to use a "big-name" architect, but when their expansion plans fell behind and alongside the completion of Walker Art Center's 2005 expansion by Herzog and de Meuron, Minneapolis Central Library's 2006 renovation by Cesar Pelli, and Guthrie Theater's

new theater by French architect Jean Nouvel, they felt pressure not to limit their search to local firms (Rosenbaum, 2006). The new wing cost \$37 million, and created space for 34 new galleries, a new lecture hall, photographs study room, prints study room, arts research library, and the 4200 square foot Graves Reception Hall (Garber, 2006; Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007a; Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007b).

MIA Profile

Mission

“The Minneapolis Institute of Arts enriches the community by collecting, preserving, and making accessible outstanding works of art from the world’s diverse cultures” (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, n.d.3).

Collections

The MIA permanent collection includes over 80,000 objects spanning 5,000 years and includes representatives of the following areas of specialization: Africa; Oceania and the Americas; Architecture; Design; Decorative Arts, Craft and Sculpture; Asian Art; Paintings and Modern Sculpture; Photographs; Prints and Drawings; and Textiles (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, n.d.1). The galleries include sixteen “period rooms.” Also in the permanent collection, off-site, is a restored house, the Purcell-Cutts House, an example of the Midwestern Prairie School of Architecture. In addition to housing the permanent collection, for over thirty years MIA has been a steady supporter and permanent home for the Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program. Although the program coordinator is employed by the museum, the exhibition program is run through an elected peer-artist committee. The stated goal of the program is to provide

Minnesota artists an opportunity to create work ‘free of aesthetic fashion or commercial demand’ (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, n.d.2).

Space

The “Target Wing” added 113,000 square feet to the existing structure (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007b), increasing the exhibition space by 40 percent with the addition of 34 new galleries (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007a). The total facility space is now comprised of three floors, a museum shop, a sit-down restaurant, café, and coffee/pastry shop. Some people are now saying that MIA is one of the nation’s top encyclopedic art museums. “People will realize that, unlike a midsize museum, you can't absorb all of this [MIA] in a single visit...There's just too much art to see at one time" (Welch as cited in Tillotson, 2006, ¶12).

Staff and Leadership

MIA operates with a staff of 254 (Abbe, 2007) and an elected board of 41 (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2008). The current director, Kaywin Feldman, was hired in January, 2008. After one hundred years of male leadership, Feldman has become MIA’s first female director, joining the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) scene’s other female museum directors of the Walker Art Center, the University of Minnesota’s Weisman Art Museum, the Museum of Russian Art, and the Minnesota Historical Society (Abbe, 2007). Two months into her tenure, Feldman initiated a reorganization of upper management stating that she was hired to be a leader, “not just to manage staff—because that’s all I’d be doing with fifteen people coming right to me” (Abbe, 2008, ¶13). Feldman reassigned ten of the fifteen staff members who had previously reported to her by creating three new upper management positions.

Attendance and Revenue

Although general admission to the collection has been free since 1988, membership is currently at 24,537 (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2008). MIA's most recent annual report (2008), shows that attendance increased 6.5% over the previous year with 495,952 visitors. The museum operates with a budget of over \$25 million, and the two most recent years ended with net incomes each over \$25,000.

Community

MIA is located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. With outlying cities, Minneapolis forms part of the Twin Cities metro area with a population of about 2.85 million (Metropolitan Council, 2008). In proportion to its size, Minneapolis is rich with arts and cultural venues. MIA competitors for a visual arts audience are the Walker Art Center and the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota. The Walker, known for its contemporary and modern art, is home to one of the city's greatest landmarks, Oldenburg and Van Bruggen's "Spoonbridge and Cherry" located in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. The Weisman Art Museum has campus visibility and Frank Gehry's stainless steel building which was added in 1993 (Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, 2004). In spite of the prominent architectural features of MIA, the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, and the Weisman Art Museum, admission to all is free.

Findings

Given the time limitations of this study, I was unable to complete interviews with multiple staff persons from MIA. However, Grants Specialist Elisabeth Brandt was a strong interview candidate for this study. I came to know Brandt during the summer of 2008 while I was

interning at MIA, and I conducted a professional informational interview with her. Through the interview and a later grantwriting experience, I realized the depth of knowledge a grant writer may gain about all of a museum's programming areas, as well as its finances. At the same time, a grant writer must be able to present information in a way that is attractive to the public and private foundations. The single interview session between Brandt and me took place on April 8, 2009, from which all quotes in this document are taken. Brandt subsequently provided primary source documents such as an executive summary of MIA's current strategic plan, and articles and director's reports which appeared in MIA membership magazines during the time at which MIA admissions was made free. Other public documents and a recent annual report are available on MIA's website. The findings of the document analysis and interview are discussed below.

Original Vision

A theme that continually emerged in MIA documents and the interview was the connection between the museum's current free admissions policy and the founding of the museum over one hundred years ago. Brandt introduced this theme at the beginning of the interview for this study:

One of the original placards [of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, founded in 1883]...[says] 'The Museum owned by the people of Minneapolis and maintained by its citizens.' So obviously, the free admission policy really echoes that sense of community ownership and the idea that the art is held in the public trust.

This tie to history is something that Brandt has been able to use in writing grants. She said, “Something, too, that I’ve written about is the ‘echo,’ the way the free admission policy kind of echoes the original vision of the founders of the museum.”

Documents collected for this study tell of the founders’ initial interests in public ownership and stewardship of the art. In the same year that the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts was founded, they held its first exhibition, charging an admission fee of 25 cents per person (Hoyt, 1998). However, as early as 1915, a statement was made by trustee Herschel V. Jones about inclusion: “The Art Institute is for the people to make the fullest use of and to protect from false friends, if they ever arise, who would monopolize it or make it exclusive” (Johnson, 1988, p. 2).

MIA changed to a free admissions policy in 1988. General admission is free to every visitor, with the exception of occasional special exhibitions. In reports made at the time of the change, then Executive Director Evan M. Maurer, articulates the circumstances and outcomes surrounding the decision. In February 1988, the Board of Trustees of MIA met for a day-long retreat that resulted in identifying the issue of accessibility and the museum (Maurer, 1989). As a result, research was conducted that revealed that the museum’s admissions charge was “a prominent barrier to accessibility” (§ 2). With concern over the negative effect of admission fees on the public and the desire to be “sensitive and responsive to [their] position as the only arts organization in the Twin Cities area to receive substantial funding from public sources” (§ 3), the trustees voted to make the museum free to the public. Maurer’s report does not credit any donor or foundation for making the decision possible, although it does acknowledge that

“overwhelmingly warm support from foundations, corporations, public institutions and individuals throughout the state” (¶ 5) was a result of the decision.

In a 1990 report Maurer reflects on MIA’s initial successes. After free admission was implemented, “by many standards,” MIA experienced one of their most successful years in history (Maurer, 1990, p.1). Setting a record for MIA, annual attendance exceeded 500,000 visitors.

Referring to the present, Brandt spoke of accessibility as a “value system.” Providing accessibility through free opportunities extends beyond general admission at MIA. Brandt said, “Admission is free, and school tours are free. We’re the only free-school-tours institution in the Twin Cities. Parking is free. You know, it’s [MIA is] an urban destination, even that [free parking] becomes an issue.” One of the latest free accessibility initiatives, is a bus scholarship program to be sponsored by the museum’s independent volunteer/philanthropic group Friends of the Institute. Bus trips can be a significant expense for a school; the free bus trips will complement the free school tours. Finally, representing the “echo” that Brandt spoke of earlier in the interview, she brought the present initiatives in museum education and access back to the founding vision:

Just in terms of resonance with the past. [The] first president of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, William Watts Folwell, who was also the University of Minnesota’s President at the time,...[said] “The American educational system will be defective until it is crowned by the museum.” So his belief in the role of museums in education is so central to what MIA does: thousands—hundreds of thousands of students every year

benefitting from the programs, the free programs. It's that kind of historical resonance, I think.

Admissions and Finances

The findings reveal that MIA's deep fiscal relationship with government support, their ability to give value to free admissions in grantwriting and public relations, and their strong membership program are unique characteristics of their admissions policy.

MIA has benefitted from generous government support for decades. One arrangement goes back to the trustees of the original Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts. Former Executive Director Maurer cited the relationship between the Museum and local government as one reason to not charge admissions:

More than seven decades ago, the trustees of The Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts and the officials of Hennepin County agreed that the property the museum stands on and its building would be donated to the public, in return for a tax millage to support museum operations for the public at large (Maurer, 1989, ¶ 3).

And according to the *MIA Annual Report 2007-08*, during FY 2008, government support accounted for nearly \$11 million of \$25.7 million in total operating revenue (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2008).

Despite the government support, there is an ongoing need for fundraising. In our interview, Brandt discussed the impact of admissions on MIA's ability to raise revenue from various sources, including foundations and membership. As a grants specialist, she does not

work much with general operating funds. However, she explained how the admissions policy impacts her work:

The majority of the grants that I work on are special project grants and ideally, projects that advance and are aligned to the strategic plan of the institution. So for me in my role here, I think the free admission argument definitely betters and makes our case that much stronger.

She said the following on public relations, “You know, what a great PR thing. I think going to charging admissions would be [problematic]—from a PR perspective...because it’s not just admission that is free; so much of our programming is free too.”

The “PR perspective” seems to imply that a positive value is placed on MIA’s free admissions and programming. And oftentimes to value, is assigned a price. At the time that admission was made free at MIA, Executive Director Evan Maurer (1989) briefly addressed public value when he wrote, “Some people have expressed the opinion that if you don’t have to pay for something, it isn’t valued or appreciated. The importance of art cannot be measured by a price of admission or the cost of a membership” (¶ 7).

Two decades later, a strong membership program at MIA proves Maurer’s point. It seems that the loss of opportunity for members to receive free admission as a membership benefit has not had a negative impact. Brandt said,

What’s amazing for me about this place [MIA], too is that we have one of the largest membership programs in the country for a free admission museum. [This], to me, is

really compelling, that people find value in becoming a member even though so many of the resources are free.

The *MIA Annual Report 2007-08* reports, "Membership remains strong, and we're grateful for every member's generous support. As of June 30, 2008, the museum had 24,537 member households, representing more than 40,000 individuals" (p. 12) Also, museum attendance has risen 6.5 percent from the previous year. It should be noted that accompanying this statistic in the annual report, is this statement: "Free general admission every day remains an extraordinary benefit, made possible by generous member, community, and corporate support" (p. 12).

Finally, in any financial conversation, one has to ask about the effects of the economic climate on an organization. An on-line statement from current Executive Director Kaywin Feldman in March 2009 announced a six percent staff reduction and a significant reduction in operating expenditures. At the same time, endowments have suffered losses, and gifts and donations have declined during the economic recession. Yet, in the statement, she preserved the mission of free admission. First she wrote,

The MIA is a vital part of this community and remains ever faithful to its pledge to remain free and accessible to everyone. Awe-inspiring, soul-nourishing works of art from around the world and throughout human history are here for all to relish, free of charge (¶13).

And again in closing she said, “Now, more than ever before, we welcome you to come to the museum, wash off that dust, and revitalize your enthusiasm—the experience is yours, it’s lasting, and it’s free” (¶6).

Yet I wondered, with such severe losses experienced by MIA during the economic recession, had admissions been recently reconsidered as a direct source of revenue? In response, Brandt replied,

To the extent of my knowledge, no, although I don’t know what people may say behind closed doors. The free admissions policy is untouchable. It’s just so central to our role in the community that I think it [changing it] would just—it’s just the wrong way [to go].

Organizational Culture

The commitment to free admissions at MIA is evident in the echo of the founding mission in current programming, in financial opportunities and in appeal to the community. And as Brandt, in the interview, gave insight into the organization’s most recent strategic planning process, it seems evident that the value of free admissions is part of MIA’s organizational culture.

Brandt has observed that with MIA’s new director, Kaywin Feldman, “there’s a renewed sense of that spirit of accessibility.” According to Brandt, because Feldman was a new director facilitating a new strategic planning process, she used the unique opportunity to meet with all of the employees, volunteers, and board members to ask questions similar to, “What gets you up out of bed every day? What brings you here, what do you really believe in?” According to

Brandt, Feldman reported, “the overwhelming response was admissions, the free admissions policy. Accessibility—that’s so key to how people define their roles here.”

“I think it’s interesting,” Brandt shared, “You know, that is such a resounding mission, even for individuals [as in] ‘why would you decide to work here?’ Like for me with my background, too, it’s an easy choice.” Brandt elaborated on her experience, “I’ve only worked for free-access types of community resources like public broadcasting and Boys and Girls Club, and different opportunities or resources in the community that are free access. I would find it difficult to justify admissions policies. But that’s just my background.”

The historical overview, organizational profile, and findings regarding MIA’s admission policy is unique and is in direct conversation with its founding and ongoing vision, fiscal status, and organizational culture. The following chapter presents the Portland Art Museum in a similar format, but represents it as an art museum which charges a general admission fee.

Chapter 5

Portland Art Museum

Introduction

The Portland Art Museum (PAM) was purposively selected for analysis because its policy to charge general admissions contrasts with that of my other case study. Extensive data were collected from primary and secondary document sources in order to construct a substantial institutional overview. The other data source, a semi-structured interview, was conducted with PAM's Associate Director of Member and Guest Services, Lisa Hoffman. This structure of this chapter parallels the previous chapter about the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The purpose of the following historical overview and profile is to provide description which lends to an intimate feel for the setting and reduces the temptation to generalize the findings to another museum.

Historical Overview

The Portland Art Museum (n.d.1) publishes a comprehensive organizational history on their website. The oldest art museum in the Pacific Northwest, PAM was founded in 1892 through the creation of the Portland Art Association. The museum collection began as approximately one hundred plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculptures, housed in Portland's public library. By 1905, PAM had moved to its own building, and shortly thereafter acquired their first piece of original art. The Museum Art School, now the Pacific Northwest College of Art, was opened in 1909. One more move, in 1932, brought PAM to its current location. The building, designed by

Portland architect Pietro Belluschi, is appropriately situated within Portland's Cultural District. Belluschi also designed a new wing to the main building, the Hirsch Wing, which opened in 1939.

Over thirty years passed before another addition, the Hoffman Memorial Wing, also by Belluschi, was completed in 1970 (Portland Art Museum, n.d.1). In 1978, the Northwest Film Center was incorporated into the Museum, and more recently, in 1993, the Vivian and Gordon Gilkey Center for Graphic Arts was opened. The latest building addition is the 1992 purchase of a Masonic temple adjacent to the museum. Renamed the Mark Building, its renovation was completed in 2005. Another major renovation was completed to the Hoffman Wing in 2000, after the successful end of, what is to date, the largest capital campaign by a cultural organization in the state of Oregon.

Two of PAM's most recent capital campaigns include one completed in 2000 for facility expansion and another in 2005 for the renovation of the museum's former Masonic temple, now named the Mark Building. The "Hoffman Wing," designed by architects Ann Beha Associates of Boston, the 2000 expansion was made possible through the Project for the Millennium Campaign. The campaign, which raised over \$45 million for the construction and operating endowment (Hatcher, 2000), was the largest capital campaign to have been completed by any cultural organization in Oregon (Portland Art Museum, n.d.1). The Hoffman Wing added 50,000 square feet and included the first new gallery spaces to the museum since 1939. The galleries were designated for the exhibition of American Indian art and art from the Northwest.

The 2005 renovation of the Masonic temple, now the Mark Building, created 141,000 square feet of new space, including exhibition space for modern and contemporary art, library, meeting spaces, ballrooms, and administrative offices (Portland Art Museum, n.d.1). According to an Associate Press (2006) article following the completion of the renovation, the original budget for the renovation was \$33 million, but grew to \$45 million. In total, the capital campaign raised \$59 million in pledges, but at press time, \$22 million in pledges were yet to be collected. Opening a line of credit around 2004, the museum took a \$20 million loan with Bank of America.

PAM Profile

Mission

“The Portland Art Museum is dedicated to serving the public by providing access to art of enduring quality, by educating a diverse audience about art, and by collecting and preserving a wide range of art for the enrichment of present and future generations” (Portland Art Museum, n.d.6, ¶1).

Collections

Serving its mission, PAM actively collects art objects which contribute to a growing collection of over 42,000 pieces (Portland Art Museum, n.d.7). Special areas of the collections include American, Asian, and European art, as well as modern and contemporary art, Native American art, Northwest art, photography, prints and drawings, and silver. The breadth of the collections typifies that of an encyclopedic art museum. At the same time, PAM claims to be distinguished in its collection of Native American art, English silver, and graphic arts.

Special programs related to collections include “Dossier” presentations. These presentations are intended to bring objects from the collection out of storage and into temporary exhibitions which focus on a theme (Portland Art Museum, n.d.5). The Crumpacker Family Library, with over 35,000 volumes, is an exceptional collection of contemporary art study materials, art archives, and archives specific to the Museum (Portland Art Museum, n.d.4). Another special exhibition program is “APEX.” This exhibition series includes three contemporary installations a year in a designated museum space. The exhibitions include works from a variety of mediums and themes, but all from Northwest artists.

Space

PAM, its buildings and outdoor Robert Evans Sculpture Mall, now occupy two and a half city blocks. Ranking amongst the top twenty-five museums in the country, for gallery and exhibition space, PAM claims more than 112,000 square feet dedicated towards galleries (Portland Art Museum, n.d.6). Ninety percent of that space is dedicated to the display of its permanent collection. As with most museums, PAM has a museum shop and café. The store is accessible from either inside the museum, or outside so as not to have to pay admissions to shop.

Staff and Leadership

PAM staff consists of about 150 full-time employees and 300 volunteers (Portland Art Museum, n.d.6). Coming from a three-year tenure as executive director of the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma (Beaudoin, 2006), the current executive director of PAM, Brian Ferriso, was hired in 2006. Ferriso replaced longtime Executive Director John Buchanan. Buchanan had been the executive director for over eleven years before moving on to become

the new director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. In the press release announcing his departure, PAM (Portland Art Museum, 2005, November 18) highlights Buchanan's achievements. In addition to noteworthy acquisitions and exhibitions and strengthening staff composition and museum programs, Buchanan's financial achievements were significant, including retiring outstanding debt and increasing membership and attendance numbers. In addition, Buchanan was the leader of a successful \$125 million capital campaign, raising both capital and endowment funds.

From the beginning, Ferriso's succession of leadership at PAM was marked by reports and press interviews that showcased his interests in quality programming, community and access, and education. In one interview, he describes his ultimate vision for PAM that for Portland it becomes "part of the fabric of daily life" (Baxter & Portland Family, n.d., ¶ 11). However, in terms of finances, Ferriso maintains, "we want to make sure first and foremost that we're stable" (¶ 7).

Attendance and Revenue

Although PAM's adult general admission fees are ten dollars, which is higher than the median seven dollar admission fee for US art museums (Merritt, 2006), annual attendance is over 350,000 visitors, more than 50,000 of which are school children (Portland Art Museum, n.d.6). A recent gift allowed PAM to offer its first free admission day in March, 2009. That day was deemed successful as PAM welcomed approximately 3,500 visitors, 1,800 of which were families who had come for the concurrent Family Day activities (Portland Art Museum, 2009). Further information regarding free admission initiatives is discussed in the following section, "Findings".

The museum's annual operating budget is approximately \$16 million (Portland Art Museum, 2008). According to the financial statements for the fiscal year ending in 2008, a total of nearly \$13 million was earned through a combination of grants, contributions, and memberships. \$1.6 Million was earned from admission fees, and a nearly equal \$1.2 million was earned from sales at the museum shop. In the financial statements, membership revenue has not been separated from grants and contributions, but memberships numbered 96,000 individuals representing 23,000 households (Portland Art Museum, n.d.6). According to their website (Portland Art Museum, n.d.3), where one can join online, dues at various membership levels range from \$55 to \$1,500 and up.

A unique source of revenue for the museum is the Rental Sales Gallery, founded in 1959 (Portland Art Museum, n.d.8). The gallery features original artwork by regional artists in three exhibitions a year. All artwork is available for rent or purchase. Museum membership is required in order to take advantage of the services of the gallery. Rental fees start at \$40 and increase for up to two consecutive three-month loans. Outright purchasing, free financing, and rent-to-buy are all options.

Community

The Portland Art Museum is located in the city of Portland, the largest city in Oregon with an estimated population of 537,081 in 2006 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Including surrounding cities, the Portland metro area has a population of over 1.8 million (Metro Regional Government, 2009). With the nearest cultural cities of similar size being Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, Canada, the city of Portland supports a wide array of cultural activities for its residents, other Oregonians, and visitors. The immediate Portland area alone includes over 150

art galleries and museums (Travel Portland, n.d.). The Northwest Film Center was founded in 1972 and joined PAM in 1979 (Portland Art Museum, n.d.2). The Center's activities consist of a year-round exhibition program featuring film and visiting artists, an education program including the School of Film and Young Filmmakers Program, as well as outreach and artist service programs.

In addition to galleries and museums, the Portland area is a popular place to enjoy nature's beauty through several parks and gardens. Traditional artistic treatments of nature are found in the Portland Classical Chinese Garden and the Portland Japanese Garden.

Findings

After consulting a peer who has experience working in the development department at PAM, I contacted Lisa Hoffman, Associate Director of Member and Guest Services, for an interview. The single interview session between Hoffman and me took place on April 8, 2009, from which all quotes in this document are taken. Hoffman is in her twelfth year working at PAM, and her position allows her to speak from a perspective of both someone intimately involved with the museum's finances as well as public relationships. For descriptive purposes, any document referring to a strategic plan was requested, but not made available. Unfortunately, PAM does not publish an Annual Report. However, I did find primary documents, such as press releases and financial statements, on-line. The findings of the document analyses and interview are outlined below.

Vision and Leadership

Despite the Portland Art Museum's age, the admissions policy has not been firmly established. Hoffman said, "from the time that I have been here, it's always been a very

evolving and organic question.” Even though the original goal of the founding Portland Art Association was “to create a first-class art museum that would be accessible to all citizens” (Portland Art Museum, n.d.1), in more recent years the focus of museum leadership has been directed elsewhere. Hoffman confirmed:

It’s not uncommon for museums across the nation to have free days or have opportunities for the public to come visit it at certain times free-of-charge. But, it certainly was not a focus of the previous administration here at the museum. It wasn’t ignored; it just wasn’t a priority.”

John E. Buchanan, Jr. was the executive director for eleven and a half years before leaving in early 2006, and his focus was on finances. In the press release announcing his departure (Portland Art Museum, 2005, November 18), Buchanan’s administration is credited for the following:

- Increasing membership from 5,700 to 23,000 households
- Increasing endowment assets from \$8.5 million to \$47 million
- Increasing the operating budget from \$6 million to \$12 million
- Retiring outstanding debt
- Increasing attendance from 55,000 to 600,000 visitors annually.

Current Executive Director Brian Ferriso was hired to fill Buchanan’s position in late 2006. Shifting the focus, Ferriso has been active in his vision to make PAM accessible to a wider community. According to Hoffman, “[Ferriso’s] main focus is really...to be able to experience art

on a regular basis, regardless of being able to afford an admission ticket or not.” In a press release, Ferriso himself said, “providing access to the museum, its exhibitions, and collections has always been one of my top priorities” (Portland Art Museum, 2008, December 17, ¶12).

While Ferriso’s vision differs from his predecessor’s, Ferriso’s plan for access follows Buchanan’s lead by emphasizing financial stability. Simply put, free admissions must be fully funded before they are implemented. As Hoffman pointed out in her interview, and is mentioned in several of PAM’s press releases, until recently free days were offered only occasionally and with no regularity. The opportunities for free admissions were based on the money that could be raised, “day per day, here and there” (Hoffman, interview, April 8, 2009). “So what [Ferriso’s] focus has been is to challenge the community and individual, corporate and government supporters to fund free access.” The strategies towards accomplishing the goal of free access come together in a plan to create the “Art Access Endowment.” The endowment has been coming together in phases, accessibility increased step-by-step. Hoffman said, “If I had to predict the future of admissions here at the museum...it’s just constantly changing depending on what can be funded and, really, based on what the director’s vision is for the organization.”

Admissions and Finances

PAM’s average cost per museum visitor is \$60, but it only directly earns up to \$10 per visitor from admissions (Portland Art Museum, n.d.9). The remainder of the cost must be raised through shop sales, income through event space rentals and the Rental Sales Gallery, donations, and endowments. The goals of the \$5.5 million Art Access Endowment, though not yet fully realized, are:

- \$1 million to fund free general admission for children and students (age 17 and under)
 - \$1 million to fund free admission for school tours
 - \$1 million to fund free transportation to the Museum for schools that need transportation assistance for student tours
 - \$1.25 million to fund free admission for all visitors on one Thursday night each month
 - \$1.25 million to fund free admission for all visitors on four Sundays per year
- (Portland Art Museum, n.d.9, ¶ 4).

Fulfilling the Art Access Endowment objectives has occurred in phases. To date, the museum has received \$1 million from Gordan Sondland and Katherine Durant for free admission for children. To fund free museum tours and K-12 school tours, the museum has received \$600,000 from the Bank of America Foundation which was matched with \$400,000 from the community. Most recently, a donation by Sharon L. Miller and family has allowed the museum the offer four free family days a year.

During our interview, Hoffman drew attention to a financial circumstance relatively unique to PAM, and one which distinctly impacts the way in which PAM earns revenue. PAM receives less than average support from government funding. Hoffman explained:

I think what's different about us is,—and as we're telling our story more, people are understanding it—is we're almost entirely privately supported...A very, very small percentage of our funding comes from government sources. So we're pretty much

entirely privately supported from individuals, foundations, and corporations. We have to be able to keep the lights on, maintain the collection, and just operate as a business. And you can't do that when you're free all the time. We have to be able to generate revenue through membership support, through admission dollars, through sales in our gift shop, through earned income...it's challenging.

The membership program generates about \$2.5 million per year in general operating support (Hoffman, interview, April 8, 2009). During the fiscal year 2008, admissions provided a little over \$1.6 million in revenue (Portland Art Museum, 2008).

In the interview, Hoffman described the responsibility of her position at PAM as "to garner as much long term support for the organization as possible through annual contributions." Consequently, she was able to elaborate on the relationship between membership and admissions at PAM. During the interview, she brought attention to how both the presence of admission fees *and* the absence of fees can be motivators in membership. In the instance where admission is charged, and PAM members receive free general admission as a benefit, Hoffman broke down the financial incentive. "I like to say, 'Do the math.' If you come into the museum, if you're coming to visit more than two or three times per year, a membership is more economically beneficial."

However, staff at PAM have found that free admission can be a value to members as well. Hoffman reported:

We've done some research studies; we've gone out with some surveys. Quite honestly, we got a really good response from our membership base that that [implementing free

days] was not going to impact their decision on whether or not to continue supporting the organization. In fact, it made them feel more engaged and proud to be a part of the organization. So, some of that is yet to be seen in the numbers. We're still looking at that.

Finally, considering PAM's admissions as "evolving and organic," as Hoffman initially described, the interview could not have concluded without considering the present state of the nation's economy. It is doubtful that any museum in the nation has been untouched by the current recession, PAM included:

We're in a situation where the economy obviously has taken a turn, and we're having a hard time—just like other organizations and other museums across the country—funding our regular programs and our exhibitions. And our membership numbers are dropping. So, that's not to say that we aren't moving full steam ahead on accessibility, it's just very, very challenging right now. (Hoffman, interview, April 8, 2009).

Internal Conversations

PAM's webpage designated towards the description of the Art Access Endowment is the closest document found to approximate a formal admissions policy. Hoffman was also not aware of any formally drafted admissions policy, and refers to the list of admissions charges that is general information made available to museum visitors. Despite the lack of documentation, Hoffman asserted, "It's [i.e. admissions] discussed quite a bit here...It's discussed frequently."

Much of the discussion has been surrounding the Art Access Endowment and the implementation of free days and free admissions. In addition, Hoffman identified strategic planning conversations, surrounding their reaccreditation with the American Association of Museums, as an environment in which discussion about admissions occurs. “Part of that process is diving into what the museum’s main objectives are, what our mission is, and how we really want to be able to ‘get to that accessibility’ and have it fully funded.”

Executive Director Ferriso has been a leader in PAM’s renewed vision to provide museum accessibility to its citizens. Additional input on decisions regarding admissions is provided by Hoffman, for example, as Associate Director of Member and Guest Services. As well, Hoffman acknowledged the museum board’s role in pursuing increased accessibility:

It’s all been very positively received. I think the board is fully engaged with heading in that direction. I think they also recognize that, you know, they have a fiduciary and fiscal responsibility to make sure the organization is operating as a fiscally sound organization.

Chapter 6

Analysis and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to present a consolidation of determining factors for art museum administrators to make decisions about admissions policies best suited for their needs. The findings from an extensive review of literature relevant to museum admissions was coded, and four themes were identified: pricing, social inclusion, relationships with other revenue sources, and tourism. In addition, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which offers free general admission, and the Portland Art Museum, which charges general admission, were purposively selected for case studies in order to illustrate how two similar museums might have arrived at different admissions policies.

Through my conceptual framework (Figure 1), I expected to find literature in reference to all of the concept clusters illustrated. Given the time limitation for my study, I was unable to address every concept because of the broad scope of my framework. In addition, it was not possible to find literature which spoke directly to all of the concepts. For example, it was very difficult to find any discussions of mission in direct reference to admissions. Though there is much literature about mission in general, the task of incorporating that literature and making it relevant was outside the purpose of my literature review.

I found it interesting, however, that gaps in the literature were filled by themes that emerged from my case studies: “mission” and “finances.” The following analysis elaborates on these themes while, when possible, speaking to the information found in existing literature.

Mission

For art museums, industry-wide conversations about mission widely address issues such as education, collecting, and even accessibility. Yet to discuss mission as it applies to development practice seems rare. Discussions about admissions policies as related to mission often occur as a result of accessibility being part of a mission. Rarely are admissions and mission examined together exclusively. The term “policy,” as in “admissions policy,” implies that some written documentation, archive or plan in hard copy exists. For MIA and PAM, except for the list of admissions fees and discounts on their websites, no explicit policy documents exist.

To start an analysis of mission, one looks at an organization’s overall mission statement. The mission for MIA is: “The Minneapolis Institute of Arts enriches the community by collecting, preserving, and making accessible outstanding works of art from the world’s diverse cultures” (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, n.d.3). And the mission for PAM is: “The Portland Art Museum is dedicated to serving the public by providing access to art of enduring quality, by educating a diverse audience about art, and by collecting and preserving a wide range of art for the enrichment of present and future generations” (Portland Art Museum, n.d.6, ¶1). At least superficially, the missions of MIA and PAM are remarkably alike. They both speak about enrichment, diversity and accessibility. However, as the findings show, the vision and strategy for each admissions policy are very different.

MIA's free admission policy is embedded in their mission which reflects the museum's original charter and comments from early leaders who declared the museum is "owned by the people of Minneapolis and maintained by its citizens" (Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts as cited by Brandt, interview, April 8, 2009). The museum's contemporary vision for accessibility echoes that of the founders. General admission is always free, school tours are free, and even parking is free. In addition, the museum's vision for admissions is frequently reflected in public documents. The sentiment expressed when talking about admissions is not so as to make the museum appear charitable in offering free access, but to reinforce the idea of ownership and right to access by its patrons. This sentiment echoes the general mission of MIA. For example, Director Kaywin Feldman's most recent annual report letter is titled, "A Treasure for All. Yours, Mine, Ours: A Community Resource with Global Reach" (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2007a).

The current goal for admissions at PAM is not to offer free general admission, but to expand the number of opportunities in which the public can experience the museum for free, as in select free days. Accessibility is explicit in the museum's mission statement, and PAM's Executive Director Ferriso has renewed the focus on access. However, the strategy to provide accessibility does not include free general admission. Free days and free programming are dependent upon securing funding for those initiatives prior to implementation.

A vision for accessibility can be used as leverage for acquiring funding. For many museums that charge an admissions fee, for example, membership programs are focused on the individual benefits a member receives. For PAM, free admission for members has been an incentive used in membership acquisition. However, findings from the review of literature suggest that many museum patrons become members for psychological reasons, such as

buying into a museum's mission. And as Hoffman indicated in her interview (April 8, 2009), recent research with PAM members finds that free admissions would make them feel more engaged with and proud of their museum. Acquiring the funds for free admission has been purposeful and focused on financial benchmarks, yet a shift in PAM's vision seems to be occurring. It is interesting, but unfortunate for this study, that the new vision is too current to reflect on its outcomes.

While art museums, and nonprofits in general, increasingly place mission at the forefronts of their reasons for being, administration becomes more business-like, with development becoming interested in maximizing revenue. An alternative to the mission-driven admissions policy is that which is driven by finances.

Finances

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) and the Portland Art Museum (PAM) significantly differ in how each has arrived at their current admissions policies. Because of the similarities between the institutions—but that MIA has free admission and PAM does not—one might be tempted to compare them as if there were no external influences. However, a very important contributing factor towards the financial stability and public accountability of the museums' admissions policies is that of government support. MIA receives considerable government support while PAM receives very little. Simply comparing the museums' needs for earned income from admissions, or earned income in general, would not be fair.

The average percentage of revenue that an art museum receives from the government is about 14% (Merritt, 2006). PAM receives well below that level of governmental support (Hoffman, personal interview, April 8, 2009). However, MIA receives nearly 40% of their

operating revenue from the government (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2008). MIA's free admission policy has been a positive feature of their museum for twenty years, and as the timeline lengthens and the admissions policy proves to endure the economic downturns, it seems that free admission will last. And while the government support received by MIA has been a significant asset, AAM recommends a diversified mix of income balanced between government, private, earned income and investment income (Merritt, 2006). A question for further inquiry is: should government funding significantly decline, is MIA's vision of free admission strong enough to carry it through? I suspect that the answer is not so simple. The vision of free admission is so integrated with the idea of ownership by the museum's community that should government funding cease, this policy would be reevaluated.

PAM's low level of government support could be used as an appeal to potential visitors as to why the admissions fee is necessary and has value. However, the "pity plea" may not work for many visitors. A former case study of the USS Constitution Museum cited in the literature review reported that educating their visitors on the fact that their museum was not federally supported was not a motivating factor to pay admissions (Logan, 2005). PAM's solution to provide free access through an endowment is a more reliable solution than funding it with money that previously was received sporadically. PAM's financial consideration of expanding access through free admission will have created sustainability for their vision.

A Blurred Line

As cases, I found that MIA's admissions policy was more mission-driven while PAM's was more driven by finances. Of course, despite the fact that the analysis from my case studies is

thematically represented by mission and finances, neither MIA nor PAM is focused exclusively on one of those themes.

MIA's commitment to community and public access translates to its organizational culture as was demonstrated by the executive director's staff interviews during recent strategic planning. At the same time, MIA receives a uniquely high level of governmental support and is able to use their free admission policy as leverage for private and foundation support.

PAM has a centralized approach to decision-making as the executive director sets the vision for the board and staff to follow. However, he reportedly has been successful at getting them "on board." Preliminary research found that members are emotionally receptive to free admission initiatives. And a successfully completed Art Access Endowment will facilitate financial sustainability for PAM to pursue its vision of accessibility.

Conclusion

The results of this study are not generalizable. However, I recommend that through evaluation and strategic planning, it may be helpful for other museum administrators to ask themselves: What pricing options do we have? What is our commitment to accessibility? How do our other resources relate to admissions? Who is our audience? What are the benchmarks set forth by leading organizations? What is our mission and how does our admissions policy reflect that mission? How does our fiscal status inform our admissions policy?

While answers to these questions will aid museum administrators in making policy decisions regarding admissions, further research is necessary. Through my conceptual framework (Figure 1) and preliminary research questions, I suggested the importance of a public perspective in admissions policies and a dialogue between them and the museum. I was

unable to pursue that perspective in my study, but perhaps beginning with visitor studies, we can gain a richer understanding of the issue.

A complementary focus of new research would be the role of nonprofit business models in creating museum admissions policies. Another issue which barely surfaced in this study is the relationship between admissions and museum architecture and design. It seems to me that museum architecture and design do influence admissions. The literature found regarding tourism and social inclusion, as well as the prevalence of museum expansions and renovations and their associated costs, suggest the need for attention to this area.

Regardless of the need for continued research, it is my hope that art museum professionals will use the information from this study to begin a framework for evaluation of the admissions policies in their respective institutions with a profound regard to the uniqueness of their organizations.

Appendix A:

Semi-Structured Interview

Case Study:

Date:

Location:

Interviewee Details:

Consent? _____ Audio recording? _____ OK to quote? _____ Member check? _____ Thank You? _____

Description of Interview Context:

Coding	Q, and A	Notes to self
	<p>What is your role in this institution and how is it impacted by the admissions policy?</p> <p>Within your organization, to what extent is the admissions policy discussed, formally or informally?</p> <p>How and why was the current admissions policy conceived?</p> <p>How, in the past, has the admissions policy of this museum been different?</p> <p>To what extent is the admissions policy regarded in current strategic plans (in your department and/or the museum)?</p> <p>How have you observed the public's behaviors and reaction to your current admissions policy?</p> <p>How do you perceive the future of this museum's admissions policy?</p> <p>Do you recommend any other sources (people or documents) relevant to my inquiry, either within this institution or beyond?</p>	

Appendix B:

Data Collection

Case Study:

Date Retrieved:

Where Retrieved:

Document Type: _____ Organizational document (describe)

_____ Secondary Source (describe)

APA Citation:

Coding	Information	Notes to self

Appendix C:

Date

Name

Address

City, State Zip

Dear <POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEE>:

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Exploring Art Museum Admissions Policies: Determining Factors and Trends*, conducted by Nicole Riewe from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to present a consolidation of determining factors for art museum administrators to make decisions about admissions policies which represent both their own needs and the interests of their constituents.

It is reasonable to assume that other factors in addition to revenue are considered when an art museum determines admissions prices and policies. There are concerns such as visitor attraction, adherence to a public mission, public relationships, and price discrimination. Although the best admissions policy will have found a balance between all factors, literature generally focuses on one topic at a time. A close examination of trends and a consolidation of determining factors, to be used on a case by case basis, would inspire museum administrators to make responsible policy decisions. This study aims to collect and analyze these trends and factors through extensive literature review, a cross-sectional illustration of U.S. art museums, and a comparative case study including the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Portland Art Museum.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your experience and expertise in the area of <DEPARTMENT> at <THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS/PORTLAND ART MUSEUM>. If you decide to participate in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in a semi-structured interview during the first months of 2009. Interviews will take place at your convenience, either in-person or via phone (lasting approximately one hour) or via e-mail. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or e-mail.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at ###.###.#### or "e-mail," or Dr. Phaedra Livingstone at ###.###.####. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, 541.346.2510.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will contact you shortly to speak about your potential involvement in this study.

Sincerely,

Nicole Riewe

Appendix D:

Exploring Art Museum Admissions Policies: Determining Factors and Trends

Nicole Riewe, Principal Investigator
University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Exploring Art Museum Admissions Policies: Determining Factors and Trends*, conducted by Nicole Riewe from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to present a consolidation of determining factors for art museum administrators to make decisions about admissions policies which represent both their own needs and the interests of their constituents.

It is reasonable to assume that other factors in addition to revenue are considered when an art museum determines admissions prices and policies. There are concerns such as visitor attraction, adherence to a public mission, public relationships, and price discrimination. Although the best admissions policy will have found a balance between all factors, literature generally focuses on one topic at a time. A close examination of trends and a consolidation of determining factors, to be used on a case by case basis, would inspire museum administrators to make responsible policy decisions. This study aims to collect and analyze these trends and factors through extensive literature review, a cross-sectional illustration of U.S. art museums, and a comparative case study including the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Portland Art Museum.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your experience and expertise in the area of <DEPARTMENT> at <THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS/PORTLAND ART MUSEUM>. If you decide to participate in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in a semi-structured interview during the first months of 2009. Interviews will take place at your convenience, either in-person or via phone (lasting approximately one hour), or via e-mail. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or e-mail. The risks to the participants of this study are minimal. The environment and circumstances of the interview in which you will be engaged will not be extraordinary when compared with the course of your everyday professional work.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks, such as loss of respect and employability, related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I believe that the results of this research project will be of value to the community of art museum professionals nationwide. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

Appendix D (continued):

If you have any questions, please contact me at ###.###.#### or “e-mail,” or Dr. Phaedra Livingstone at ###.###.####. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, 541.346.2510.

Please read and initial each of the following statements to indicate your consent:

- _____ I consent to the use of audio recording and note taking during my interview.
- _____ I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.
- _____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.
- _____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.
- _____ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to those data appearing in the final revision of any publications that may result from this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Nicole Riewe

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