THE VALUE OF A STUDENT AND COMMUNITY DOCENT PROGRAM:
A CASE STUDY AT THE WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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*****

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2008

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ABSTRACT

The great museums of the 21st century will pursue missions that create spaces of learning and build communities. Excellence and Equity charged museums with using all their resources toward these ends but the docent’s role in these aims is often overlooked. This case study explores the value of the student and community docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts, located on The Ohio State University campus in Columbus, Ohio. Participant observation, autoethnography, and narrative interviews are used to assess the program’s value to participants, the center, the university and the community.

A discussion of the administration of the docent program is provided. Topics include formation, goals, pedagogy, training format and content, and evaluation methods. The lived experience of participants in the docent program describes motivations, perceived usefulness of training program components, the alignment between staff and participant views of the docent’s role, rewards associated with participation, and observations on how the docent program bridges the center and the university communities.

Findings suggest that when docents at the Wexner Center engage visitors in a dialogue about art, they build bridges to learning and create social capital. A description of the program’s public value to stakeholders is followed by implications for the field and suggestions for future research.
This thesis is dedicated to docents everywhere who build bridges to learning and community.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to my advisor, Dr. Margaret J. Wyszomirski. Her guidance, encouragement, and ability to eloquently formulate the thoughts in my head carried me through this process.

I am forever thankful to Dr. James H. Sanders, III for meticulous and desperately appreciated edits, midnight consultations, and unwavering support.

Thank you to the Department of Art Education for supporting my academic pursuits and instilling in me the importance of pushing the cultural policy, arts education, and arts administration fields forward. The professors at the John Glenn School of Public Affairs are amazing, and shaped my views on the value of public service and the necessity of civic engagement.

This research absolutely could not have occurred without the assistance and support of the docent program staff at the Wexner Center for the Arts. I can’t think of enough ways to say thank you to Tracie McCambridge, Shelly Casto, Christina Mathison, and Betsy Pandora for their insight and lightning fast e-mail responses to questions about even the most ordinary statistic or detail.

Thank you to the students and community members who serve as docents at the Wexner Center for allowing me to share your stories. I am impressed and humbled by your talent and dedication to the visitors with whom you explore the galleries and life.
A number of individuals took the time to share ideas, comments, and suggestions throughout the many stages of this research. Thank you to Ioana Munteanu, Andrew Pekarik, and Zahava Doering in the Office of Policy and Analysis at the Smithsonian Institution and Barbara Zolinger Sweney at the Columbus Museum of Art.

Thank you to my family and friends for their encouragement, assurance I would survive, and trust that I would actually be in touch after this was over. I am lucky to have you as my support system.

I am ever grateful to Donna Collins at Ohio Citizens for the Arts for providing professional and personal guidance from the moment I arrived in Columbus and to Donn Vickers for challenging me to think about what it really means to be a leader.

Finally, I would not have survived writing a thesis (or the past two years) without the support and understanding of my partner, Mara Gross. Thank you for starting dinner, listening to me constantly ramble about every sentence of progress I made, and everything in between.
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FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Arts Policy & Administration
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The average museum attendee spends 27.5 seconds in front of a piece of art before moving on (Smith & Smith, 2001). These few moments allow visitors to note its physical characteristics and make a quick judgment about personal preference. However, it leaves little time for interpretation. Terry Barrett (2008), a professor and author of art criticism, writes,

To interpret a work of art is to make sense of it…It is to ask and answer questions such as: What is this object or event that I see or hear or otherwise sense? What is it about? What does it represent or express? What does or did it mean to its maker? What is it a part of? Does it represent something? What are its references? What is it responding to? Why did it come to be? How was it made?...What does it mean to me? (p. 7).

Few of these questions can be explored in less than 30 seconds. But when they are the topic of conversation among individuals gathered around an object in a gallery space there is incredible potential for multiple viewpoints to facilitate an understanding and connection that enriches the museum experience. Museum educators play a crucial role in giving visitors tools to contextualize, approach, and appreciate art. The focus of this thesis is a specific type of museum educator, the docent. Docents are individuals,
typically volunteers, trained to lead the public through museum galleries and enhance
their understanding of the institution and its collection.

Over the past 20 years an explosion of research on learning in museums has
provided insights into how visitors can get the most out of their experiences. Museums
are now widely acknowledged as settings for informal, contextual, and life-long learning.
John Falk and Lynn Dierking’s (2000) *Contextual Model of Learning* is highly-regarded
and suggests that “learning is influenced by three overlapping contexts: the personal, the
sociocultural, and the physical” (p. 13). The interaction of these contexts over time
shapes how individuals learn and how they are able to make meaningful connections in
museums. Falk and Dierking also point out that museums are fundamentally sociocultural
environments in which social interaction, or conversation, “is a primary mechanism of
knowledge construction and distributed meaning-making” (Ibid, p. 110). Conversation
between groups of visitors can be facilitated and greatly enhanced by museum staff and
docents, a social interaction central to this thesis.

In 2005 the late, renowned scholar Stephen Weil addressed a crowd of museum
professionals in Columbus, Ohio about the importance of docents. In a lecture entitled,
“Art as Mirror and Gateway: The Role of the Docent” Weil touched on traditional
methods for stimulating learning in the museum, including exhibition catalogues, wall
labels, gallery hand-outs, and audio tours. In his view none of these tools provide
opportunities for dialogue that can trigger insight or understanding. Docents, on the other
hand, infuse museum experiences with interaction that facilitates interpretation and
meaning-making. Weil (2005) commented:
To sense how the museum visitor’s experience can be transformed into something far richer, we must climb to still the next rung, to the point where we introduce other human beings – human beings in real time and real space… [W]hat we might provide our visitors instead is an interactive and engaged social experience that can, in itself, serve as a vehicle for learning.

My own experiences in museums, as both viewer and guide, have supported the assertion that docents open avenues to learning and meaning-making that one often cannot reach on their own. This study seeks to understand strategies that might enrich the museum experience, enhance learning, and expand opportunities for people to interpret and connect with art and one another. The docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts is a case where a corps of individuals is dedicated to enhancing the museum experience.

Overview: Wexner Center for the Arts and Docent Program

The Wexner Center for the Arts is located on The Ohio State University campus in Columbus, Ohio. Founded in 1989, the center is a multidisciplinary research laboratory for contemporary art. The center combined and expanded two of the many visual and performing arts presenters on campus: the University Gallery of Fine Art and Mershon Auditorium. The following mission statement guides the center’s policies and activities.

The Wexner Center for the Arts is The Ohio State University’s multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art. Through exhibitions, screenings, performances, artist residencies, and educational programs, the Wexner Center acts as a forum where established and emerging artists can test ideas and where diverse audiences can participate in cultural experiences that enhance understanding of the art of our time. In its programs, the Wexner Center balances a commitment to experimentation with a commitment to traditions of innovation and affirms the university’s mission of education, research, and community service. (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008a)

The center’s education department organizes numerous programs and activities for visitors of all ages that complement these exhibitions as well as film screenings and performances. One ongoing educational offering connected to exhibitions is the gallery tour. Docents use an inquiry and discussion-based pedagogy to lead school and community groups on interactive tours “to explore and appreciate the connections between contemporary art and their own lives” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008b). The program’s pedagogy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

The education department tracks the number of docent-led tours in three main categories: exhibition, walk-in, and architecture. Exhibition tours are docent-led tours through the galleries for any pre-arranged group of people (including school groups). Walk-in tours are Thursday evening and Saturday afternoon docent-led tours for unscheduled groups. Architecture tours are docent-led tours of the Wexner Center’s interior and exterior architecture. Over the past several years the number of tours offered and visitors participating in the tours have steadily increased. These counts are tallied according to the Wexner Center’s fiscal year, which runs from July 1 to June 30. Figure 1.1 provides the total number of tours and attendance in fiscal years 2006 and 2007, disaggregated by the type of tour. Because data for May and June were not available at
the time of publication, data for fiscal year 2008 represents totals for July 2007 through April 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour Type</th>
<th>Number of Tours</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FY 06</td>
<td>FY 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk-in</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1: Total number of tours and visitors taking tours, fiscal years 2006, 2007, and 2008 (partial)

So far this fiscal year, docents at the Wexner Center have led 284, or 40 percent, more tours than two years ago. Docents have had a discussion about art with 6,546 people. This is 2,818, or 43 percent, more individuals than two years ago. These numbers indicate large growth in a relatively short amount of time.

Docents who lead gallery tours come from across the community and have an “active commitment to exploring contemporary art and promoting its ability to engage, provoke, and illuminate” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008b). While no previous experience is required, interested individuals must participate in a training program before they become docents. Administration of the docent program is the responsibility of four education staff members: the Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs, the Graduate Assistant for Docent and Teacher Programs, the Education Outreach and Development Coordinator, and the Director of Education.

In the fall of 2006 the education department introduced a university student component to their existing docent program. There are now two docent categories:
student and community. The student docent program is “open to all graduate and undergraduate students from any academic department from any local college or university” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008b). The community docent program is open to anyone not enrolled as a student. Students and community members participate in the same training process before they are considered active docents, but receive different benefits for their participation.

The docent training program has been structured to overlap with The Ohio State University’s fall and winter academic quarters. All candidates must submit a resume and brief statement of intent before interviewing with education department staff. Those admitted to the program begin in September and participate in weekly training sessions through December. A complete copy of the syllabus from the fall 2007 course is located in Appendix A, and states, “This course introduces students to the theory and techniques of teaching in art galleries at the Wexner Center for the Arts” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2007, p. 1). Training continues into the winter quarter and consists of gallery learning sessions and co-tours where docents-in-training partner with experienced docents to practice leading a tour. When both docents-in-training and the education staff feel prepared, candidates lead a solo tour observed by staff. Once docents are successfully evaluated they are considered “active” and may sign up to lead tours using the center’s scheduling system. Docents are invited to sign up for sessions when available, but are not required to make a commitment to the center after training is complete or meet a monthly quota. Figure 1.2 outlines the basic requirements for successful completion of the training program.
Docent-in-Training Program Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Quarter</th>
<th>Winter Quarter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 10 weekly lecture and discussion sessions; 2 hours each week</td>
<td>• 3 partnered co-tours with active Wexner Center docents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Required reading</td>
<td>• 3 partnered co-tour reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Museum education theory</td>
<td>• Professional development gallery sessions (exact number varies by quarter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Exhibition-related materials</td>
<td>• 1 solo tour presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gallery learning sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 6 shadowed tours and written reflections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Written assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Active looking exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Audience strategy paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Tour shadowing experience paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1 “tour stop” presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.2: Docent-in-training program requirements, fall and winter quarter

Depending on tour availability, the exhibition calendar, and how prepared the docent-in-training and staff feel, co-touring may continue beyond the winter quarter into the spring and summer. Students are not penalized academically if they do not complete training during the winter quarter. Rather, staff members encourage docents-in-training to work with active docents and co-tour until they are comfortable and prepared to lead their own tour.

Importantly, the Wexner Center has no permanent collection and curates new exhibitions approximately three times per year. With three main gallery spaces, exhibitions can showcase one or several artists. For docents, this requires becoming an expert on new, often multiple, artists and concepts on a regular basis. Further, because the exhibits consists of contemporary art, and sometimes new pieces commission by the
center through artist residencies, volumes of art historical research about the work is scarce. Staff members for the docent program compile docent binders for each new exhibit filled with journal and newspaper articles related to the artist and art form, but often without information about the pieces on display. Because the exhibitions feature the work of living artists, docents frequently have the opportunity to hear directly from the artists during gallery talks. Docents are also encouraged to attend public programming for lectures and curator talks to complement their understanding of the exhibit. Education staff schedules numerous gallery learning and brainstorming sessions throughout an exhibition for docents to share ideas and successful strategies. The Winter 2008 Docent Calendar can be found in Appendix B and is an example of the ongoing professional development offered to docents in conjunction with an exhibit. These information sessions are not required, but docents are encouraged to attend in order to enhance tours with additional talking points and lines of inquiry.

The education staff sets high expectations for the behavior and attitude of all docents. Trainees must be punctual, attend all required formal training sessions, participate in group discussions, communicate effectively with Wexner Center staff and partner docents, maintain a positive attitude, and respond to constructive criticism in a productive manner. The syllabus for each quarter contains the following statement describing the Wexner Center’s expectation of respectful behavior.

In this course you are expected to demonstrate integrity, be responsive to the welfare of others, foster a positive climate based on trust and mutual responsibility, and exhibit sensitivity to and respect for multiple socio-cultural realities, diversity and difference including, but not limited to, sexual identity, ability, class, race, gender, ethnicity, and age. This includes using suitable language, mannerisms and interpersonal skills. (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2007)
Advancement in the program at each stage is at the discretion of the education department staff and is not solely based on the completion of course assignments and tours.

The Wexner Center advertises a combination of tangible and inherent benefits to compensate docents for their service and commitment. Some of these benefits are offered to all docents while others are tailored to docents based on their student or community status. This enables the Wexner Center to target docent needs on a highly specialized basis. The benefits offered to student and community docents are listed on the Wexner Center’s website and summarized in Figure 1.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Docent Program Benefits Offered by the Wexner Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Docents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Credit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 5 credits for fall quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2 credits for winter quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Enrollment is through the Ohio State’s Department of Art Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compensation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• $23.70 stipend per tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Rate is $7.90 per hour for 3 hours per tour; 1.5 hours of preparation and 1.5 hours of touring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bonus Benefits</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connect with others interested in contemporary art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet artists and curators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn how museums work from the inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support the center’s mission of active participation with contemporary art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop and practice presentation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Actively participate in larger Columbus community by working with diverse groups interested in exploring contemporary art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bonus Benefits**

- Eligible for expense-paid trip to national professional development conference; awarded to one person annually
- Complimentary drink ticket after tour
- Parking passes

Figure 1.3: Benefits offered to student and community docents by the Wexner Center

The Wexner Center outlines benefits that are inherent to the work of a docent and ones the center believes will motivate and sustain participation. Benefits such as connect with
others interested in contemporary art, support the center’s mission, develop and practice presentation skills, and learn how museums work from the inside are considered primary benefits for Community docents and bonus benefits for Student docents. Similar benefits, particularly for community docents, are reported by many other programs, and will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Two. However, the ordering of this description implies that benefits motivating community members are a bonus to students, who will find the greatest benefit in academic credit and monetary compensation. A review of numerous university student docent programs, including the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon and Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago revealed that academic credit and compensation are only offered by a handful of programs across the country. Most program notes informal benefits such as learning more about art and developing public speaking skills. Thus, while many of the center’s offerings are common, it sees a need to offer more than institutional engagement to attract student participants.

Research Question and Objectives

This research seeks to understand the value of a student and community docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts, to the participants, to the center, and to the community. The term “value” is explored openly throughout the research process and will be delineated only after information from stakeholders and the literature reveal the range and intensity of those values. Geursen and Rentschler (2003) apply basic values from the field of Economics to the cultural sector that can be used as one framework for a discussion on the value of this docent program. The authors note that in The Wealth of
Adam Smith discussed “utility” as a central component of value: “the benefits deliverable to particular individuals, groups, or sociological structures by access or possession of a particular article or service” (Ibid, p. 198). In my analyses, the value of this program to docents, the center and the community is framed by the literature and refined based on my observation of the training program, gallery tours, associated printed materials, and opinions from interviews. Geursen and Rentschler observe that “in a postmodern world, value or utilities are not general but are specific for each individual connected with a process” (Ibid, p. 199). Because value is interpreted differently by each stakeholder, the objective of this research is to gather and synthesize many perceptions of this program’s value. The methods for this case study were chosen to best determine and qualify the views of individuals across the docent training and tour setting.

The value of the docent program at the Wexner Center will be assessed using process and summative evaluations. I will explore the administration of the docent program, its intended goals, the structure and content of the training course, and evaluation methods. In this study, student and community docents are considered the program’s primary participants and audience; visitors are considered a secondary audience. The summative evaluation will consider the docent’s lived experience, including motivations, rewards, and perceptions of the training course, the docent’s role, and components of a successful program. Because it is beyond the scope of this study, the value of this program to the community can only be inferred if and when docents and staff reference a positive response from visitors. Statements about the value of this program to the community will not be considered fact, but they will be acknowledged as observations from the docents and staff and suggested as potential values. These findings
will be compared with trends in the field: Is this program unique in structure, goals, and challenges? a variation of other docent programs that involve students? or one of many similar programs? The research methods used for the process and summative evaluations will include participant observation, autoethnography, and narrative interviews. In each part of the study, I consider the following questions:

- What value does the program hold for the docents, the Wexner Center, and the community? What community(ies) does this program serve?
- What role does the docent fill at the Wexner Center?
- Is the program achieving its mission and goals?
- What attributes make this program successful, or not?
- What improvements, if any, can be made?
- What are the implications of an intergenerational docent program for the museum education field?

Researcher Interest

One of the best predictors of an adult’s attendance at museums is whether or not (s)he was taken to museums as a child (Falk, 1998). I have many wonderful childhood memories of visiting the LaBrea Tar Pits, the Children’s Museum of Los Angeles, and the California Museum of Science and Industry (now the California Science Center) with my family. The size of the Tyrannosaurus Rex, the age of the Milky Way Galaxy, and the beauty of quartz crystals emerging from geodes filled me with awe and curiosity. It was not until my freshman year of college that I began to visit art museums with any regularity. At the University of California San Diego I took a series of art history courses to fulfill a general education requirement, including a survey course with Professor Mary Vidal, whose enthusiasm and knowledge inspired me to turn a requirement into a minor. I took many courses from Vidal and served as her research assistant. Her lectures and our
conversations whetted my appetite for art history. Vidal was the first person to introduce me to arts administration and suggest I combine my Economics major with my interest in the arts and pursue an internship with the National Endowment for the Arts.

When first visiting museums for art history assignments I was excited to apply the history I had learned in class to pieces I recognized. I often took friends with me on these outings and found myself giving informal tours through the galleries as we passed pieces I recognized. I enjoyed sharing information I remembered from my courses and looking closely with another person to discover something new. Professor Vidal assigned active looking exercises based on pieces in the museum with which I was not familiar. I was surprised by how much I could learn from a piece of art simply by spending an extended amount of time asking questions about the content, shape, color, and feeling of a work.

My graduate studies have afforded me the opportunity to explore museum education in a formal setting. Prior to my enrollment in the Wexner Center’s docent-in-training program, two courses significantly enhanced my understanding of learning in museums and the role of docents. A museum practicum class taught by Barbara Zolinger Sweney at the Columbus Museum of Art highlighted docent training, practice, and techniques for gallery teaching. Sweney manages one of the largest docent corps in the Midwest and provided valuable insight into all aspects of administration for a large docent program. I also took a course on museum education theory that introduced me to the on-going debate in the field over strategies for object-interpretation in galleries. When considering what and how to teach novice viewers about art, I found a combination of questions and information can be effective and enhance the museum experience. In the seminal work, *From Knowledge to Narrative*, Lisa Roberts (1997) explored the evolving
definition of education, its role in museums, and the professionalization of museum educators. Roberts asserts that “education is fundamentally a meaning-making activity that involves a constant negotiation between the stories given by museums and those brought by visitors” (p. 14). This view challenges traditional models of authority while creating opportunities for museums to fold their raisons d’état, learning and community-building, into one.

As stewards of cultural heritage, museums deliver public goods. They foster connections between art and individuals that enhance understanding, respect, and appreciation. Docents are essential intermediaries for facilitating this meaning making between collections and visitors. Skilled docents can provide visitors with the tools and context necessary for interpreting art and developing (personal) narratives that enhance the museum experience. Today, museums are exploring new roles and recognizing that in order to remain relevant in the 21st century they must reach out to audiences in new and creative ways (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2002). The American Association of Museums (AAM) 2008 Annual Meeting offers a variety of sessions geared toward connecting with new audiences, including “Led by the Needs of the Community: Underserved and Overlooked” and “From Consumers to Contributors: Engaging On-site Audiences Through User-Generated Content” (AAM, 2008a). Programming and technology are examples of traditional and new strategies for reaching audiences. Interpersonal interaction in galleries is perhaps the most traditional and authentic experience museums can offer. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature exploring strategies museums are using to fill traditional and new roles, with particular emphasis on the role of the docent in this endeavor.
Significance and Scope of the Study

This thesis aims to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the theory and practice of museum education. The case I have selected has many facets and its uniqueness makes generalizability difficult. This is a student and community docent program at a multidisciplinary contemporary arts center with no permanent collection located in the Midwest on the largest state university in the country. Regardless of their (dis)similarity with the Wexner Center, all museums recognize the importance of providing educational opportunities that reach diverse audiences. The Wexner Center education department identified its target audience, the university community, and modified an existing program to incorporate its members. While is it unlikely there is one set of best practices for a student (or intergenerational) docent program, this research aims to identify successful administrative and pedagogical practices for this case that may be adapted by other museum educators to achieve similar goals in their own unique environments. A consideration of the docent’s experience in the program will synthesize multiple viewpoints and contribute to an assessment of the program’s effectiveness and value.

This study was shaped by my own prior experiences and a review of the literature, which are reflected in the chosen methods. My initial thoughts about the value of docent programs were reinforced and contested by the literature and conversations with practicing museum educators and researchers. I found that the literature surrounding gallery education was generally written by and for museum education practitioners but frequently omitted in discussions about the larger museum community. Thus, this
research seeks to draw attention to the potential of student (and intergenerational) docent programs to contribute to the public good museums provide their communities. The following suppositions contributed to my initial research design, interview questions, and analysis.

- The docent experience will be delineated between student and community docents, who share similar rewards but different motivations for participation. All docents are connected by their love for art and commitment to life long learning, but needs and interests that vary across life stages prompt individuals to engage in the docent training program for different reasons.

- Docent programs can uniquely contribute to museum missions because docents are a highly specialized segment of the museum’s audience serving the entire range of visitors. This position allows docents to act as a unique conduit between the museum’s narrative and the visitor’s narrative.

- Docents can potentially fill numerous roles beyond gallery educators. They are ideally positioned to serve as ambassadors to the community, visitor researchers, and program developers.

- Docent programs bond social capital among their participants. Docents bridge social capital between visitors, unlike individuals who come to museums for a variety of reasons.

- The student docent program represents a way for museums to build their volunteer force and the next generation of arts patrons. Participants represent a younger generation of volunteers in the arts.

- The student docent program is a creative method of audience development for a museum located on a university campus.

The implementation of my research plan and analysis of findings draws on, but is not constrained by, these hypotheses.

Numerous student docent programs, serving students of all ages, exist in museums across the country. To date, no study has attempted to create a profile of these programs. Time and resource constraints limited my research plan, as noted in Chapter 3,
Methodology. Further, the focused sample size of the research does not enable me to make any firm conclusions about the impact of the Wexner Center’s docent program on the community, which primarily includes the university, the city of Columbus, and central Ohio. No visitors were interviewed or surveyed for this research. Therefore, any conclusion made about the docent program’s impact on communities comes from docent and staff experiences and inferences.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two, Review of the Literature, contextualizes the Wexner Center for the Arts docent program in the museum and museum education fields. The chapter begins with an overview of the museum environment and focuses on the role of museums as bridges to community and learning. A central hypothesis of this thesis is that docents work at the intersection of these roles; as such, a large portion of the chapter is dedicated to exploring the status of the docent field, motivations, rewards, and potential roles. A profile of museum volunteers is provided and segues into a discussion of student docents and generational views on volunteering. Finally, a brief discussion on university museums provides a framework for understanding the Wexner Center’s role in its community.

Chapter Three, Methodology, outlines the research methods used for this case study. Participant observation, autoethnography, and narrative interviews were used to answer multiple questions related to the process and summative evaluations. The data collection process is described in detail and identifies compliance with the Institutional Review Board. Data analysis uses a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967
and Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and is influenced by Catherine Kohler Riessman’s (2002) model of narrative analysis.

Chapter Four, Administration of a Student and Community Docent Program, presents data and findings related to this study’s process evaluation. The program’s formation, including goals and planning process, is explored. The content of the docent training program, including the pedagogy and individual components are described. Evaluation methods used by the Wexner Center are compared with those advocated by the literature. The final section notes staff priorities for the future of the program.

Chapter Five, The Docent’s Experience, addresses the study’s summative findings based on my analysis of responses from student and community docents and my experience in the training program. Major sections include the docent’s motivation, an evaluation of the training program and recommendations for improvement, rewards encountered as docents, the docent’s role in the museum, and perceptions of the program’s ability to institutionally bridge the Wexner Center and The Ohio State University. Docent responses are considered in relation to staff expectations and major themes from the literature.

Chapter Six, Conclusion, summarizes findings from the data collection and analysis. Major findings are presented in four areas of program assessment: Does the docent program meet its stated goals? Is the training program pedagogy effective? What are effective strategies for this program’s administration? and, What is the value of a student and community docent program? Findings from this study have implications for the field. Lessons learned and suggestions for future research will call attention to those contributions.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to serve educational missions and positively impact their communities, museums must utilize every available resource to its fullest potential, especially human resources known as docents. Docents are individuals who guide visitors through museums and help them understand and interpret what is in the galleries. Beyond admissions personnel and security, docents may be the only contact visitors have with museum staff. Docents are one of the primary sources of educational programming in museums, using their knowledge and communication skills to facilitate audience engagement with collections and exhibitions. Docents are an integral part of museums and carry out the mission statements of the institutions they represent. Docent tours are not only learning experiences, they are social experiences that can encourage interaction and sharing ideas and perspectives. The docent is a valuable resource that facilitates learning and connections among visitors, communities, the museum, and art.

The literature review for this study includes theoretical, empirical, and practical essays as well as practitioner resources from the museum, museum education, cultural policy and volunteer fields. This chapter looks at the role of museums as bridges between communities and as spaces of learning. A review of the existing literature on docents summarizes the major resources for docent educators and generally accepted training
patterns, motivations, and benefits. It also explores traditional and potential roles docents serve in museums and profiles museum volunteers. An overview of volunteerism in the arts across generations and an exploration of university museums provide a framework for understanding distinctive components of the student and community docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts.

The Museum’s Role

A variety of economic and social trends over the past several decades have altered the missions museums pursue and the way their operations. Once considered cabinets of curiosities for the elite, museums in the 21st century are driven by educational missions and service to communities. Museum scholar Stephen Weil (2002) described how the museum institution has changed.

In little more than an generation, we have witness the museums’ metamorphosis from an institution that’s turned primarily inward and concerned above all with the growth, care and study of its collection to an institution that’s turned primarily outward—an institution striving, above all, to provide a range of educational and other public services to the individuals and communities that constitute its target audience. (p. 1)

As museums move toward becoming experience-centered institutions (rather than collection-centered), they are developing innovative programs, reaching out to new audiences, and making concerted efforts to meet the public’s needs and expectations.

Bridges to Community

The first step for museums embracing a public service role is to identify their community by looking closely at their contributors, audiences, and social contexts. Community can be defined in many ways. For example, community can be a means of
self-identification such as the Latino, Queer, or Jewish communities. Community has also been used to describe the cultural groups that live in a museum’s geographic community (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2002, p. 8). Another school of thought advocates for an expanded concept of community engagement, “which blurs the definitions of place and transcends the idea that focusing on ‘community’ means targeting people of particular demographic characteristics” (Sperr & Hirzy, 1995, p. 3). Each museum’s community is unique, and shaped by its location, history, outreach strategies, and programs.

Shifting demographics are reshaping every museum’s communities. Most notably, an aging population, the growing influence younger generations, and increased ethnic diversity have transformed today’s American museum market. In 2004, Secretary Lawrence Small of the Smithsonian Institution discussed the issue of new audiences at the Smithsonian Institution Council meeting.

The face of America is changing. We must appeal to new audiences where they live, literally and metaphorically. Otherwise, we will gradually become irrelevant…We need [to] answer such challenging questions as: What can we do with our exhibitions and outreach to attract more minorities? Are there specific ways we can appeal to Generations X and Y? How can we ensure that all members of a family of three generations can enjoy our museums and exhibitions at the same time? (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2004, p. 2)

Museums must provide an array of programs and services that balance each of these constituents’ different definition of relevance.

In 2003, the oldest baby boomers (1943-1960) turned 60 years old. Three years later the 2006 US Census found that boomers represent over 78 million, or about 25 percent of the American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Huber and Skidmore
(2003) assert that the baby boomer generation is marked by individualism, particularly consumerism,

The baby boomers are the first generation to have grown up in a consumer society: to be products of the age of affluence; to have been advertised and marketed to all their lives; to have come to expect their individual wants and needs to be satisfied; to have been encouraged to define themselves by the personal choices they make about what to wear, buy, eat or watch. (pp. 34-35)

For museums, this means asking, how can we “appeal to the educated or curious individual rather than serving up one dish for all? What do the baby boomers want from our museums and galleries and are we supplying it (or indeed even able to supply it)?” (Davies, 2005, p. 71). Museums must consider this in terms of collections and exhibitions, programming, and even basic amenities such a signage and cafés that are part of the museum experience.

Younger audiences are also becoming key players in cultural participation, “The tastes associated with Generation X and, even more so, the immense Generation Y cohort (which is larger than the Baby Boom generation) will soon dominate U.S. society in both its commercial and cultural manifestations” (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2004, p. 12). Connecting with an audience that has grown up in the information age, is comfortable with new technologies, and looks for participatory experiences is a challenge to many museums that focus on traditional outreach strategies.

Globalization has connected individuals and changed the makeup of neighborhoods across the country. “A conservative estimate is that by no later than 2050, half of the U.S. population will be from ‘minority’ groups. The Latino and Asian communities are growing at a particularly rapid clip, and the wealth controlled by
minority communities is expanding at a staggering rate” (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2004, p. 12). As ethnic groups continue to grow and gain market share in American communities, museums have the opportunity to fulfill their public service role in new, exciting, and valuable ways.

Reaching out to each of these audiences will require museums to engage in an open dialogue. A report by the Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Policy and Analysis on increasing and diversify audiences concluded, “Leaders must be willing to listen to members of demographic groups they wish to reach, and to allow what they hear to influence how programs are developed” (2004, p. 7). As audiences change, so do the expectations and needs to which museums must respond. The successful 21st century museum will rethink their goals, activities, and resource use to prioritize community engagement that demonstrates their relevance to the public.

Evidence that museums have responded to these external forces and embraced their new public service role pervades the field. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is federally mandated to support activities that “encourage and support museums in carrying out their public service role of connecting the whole society to cultural, artistic, historic, natural, and scientific understandings that constitute our heritage” (Public Law 108-81, 2003). IMLS serves this mission through grant making, conferences, research, reports, and awards. One of the many grants offered by IMLS is Museums for America, which “provides strategic operating grants that support institutions while demonstrating how and why ‘museums matter’” (Semmel & Bittner, 2007, p. 81). These grants allow museums to carry out their public service role in three categories: sustaining cultural heritage, supporting lifelong learning, and serving as
centers of community engagement. Additionally, Coming Up Taller awards administered by IMLS recognize exceptional programs developed by museums that provide young people with opportunities to contribute to their communities and the National Medal for Museum and Library Service honors museums that make significant contributions to their communities.

The American Association of Museums (AAM) is another national cultural leader actively promoting community involvement. AAM offers an Accreditation program for museums, a “widely recognized seal of approval that brings national recognition to a museum for its commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement” (AAM, 2007a). The Accreditation Program Standards contain a section on Public Trust and Accountability which requires that “The museum identifies the communities it serves, and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them” (AAM, 2005, p. 1). Further, AAM marked its centennial by declaring 2006, “Year of the Museum.” Congress honored the celebration by passing resolutions that cited efforts by museums to build civic engagement: “Whereas museums enhance the public’s ability to engage as citizens, through developing a deeper sense of identity and a broader judgment about the world” (Senate Resolution 437, 2006). AAM’s 2008 Annual Meeting provided numerous sessions on community engagement, including “Local is Global: Mastering Civic Engagement in a Changing World” and “The Museum Director as Civic Leader” (AAM, 2008a). Policies promoted by these national organizations guide the activities of 17,500 museums across the country. When leaders such as IMLS and AAM emphasize community engagement through special initiatives and grant-making
requirements that supply valuable resources, museums have additional incentives to reach out to their communities.

In 1998 AAM launched the Museums and Community Initiative to explore the potential for civic engagement between communities and museums. The initiative held six forums across the country, invited participants from previously unengaged segments of the community, and resulted in *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums* (AAM, 2002). In the opening essay, Ellen Hirzy asserts that museums can engage communities and build social capital in countless ways.

Museums are community institutions in the most basic of ways. They are established, familiar parts of the landscape. They contribute to the economy and to cultural tourism. They have strong connections to schools. They are places to meet friends, find shelter from hot weather, shop for a birthday gift, see a film or performance, have a cup of coffee, or feed the spirit. (Ibid, p. 15)

The Museums and Community Initiative was developed soon after Robert Putnam’s 1995 best-seller *Bowling Alone* discussed the decline of social capital and connections among individuals in America. Importantly, Putnam distinguished between *bonding* social capital (connections that link like people) and *bridging* social capital (connections that link unlike people). Bridging social capital is more difficult to foster, but crucial to a vital citizenry and community. Among the numerous avenues for building social capital, Putnam asserts that “art is especially useful in transcending conventional social barriers” (1995, p. 411). In 1999, Putnam’s consulting firm hosted the seventh annual Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, which focused on the arts. A conference summary report states:
Cultural endeavors offer social capital effects both direct and indirect, immediate and long lasting. The arts provide a powerful way to transcend the cultural and demographic boundaries that divide us and to find deeper spiritual connections with those like us. To use our phrasing, the arts create both “bridging” and “bonding” social capital. (BetterTogether: The report of the Saguaro seminar: Civic engagement in America, 2001, p. 45)

Professionals in the museum community assert that their institutions are poised to create both bonding and bridging social capital in today’s rapidly changing environment. A report by the Smithsonian Institution in 2002 assessed the ways museums in the 21st century can positively affect society: “In the dialogue, the three interconnected roles of facilitator of civic engagement, agent of social change and moderator of sensitive social issues are especially important” (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2002, p. 2). In another essay from Mastering Civic Engagement Christopher Gates notes several ways museums are able to use their resources to facilitate civic engagement and build social capital.

Anything museums do to create interactive experiences that people can share and discuss enriches [social connectedness]… Museums play an important role in validating both the unique stories of diverse cultures and the shared story that unites all members of a society. These are the bonding and bridging functions that museums contribute to a society’s store of social capital. (AAM, 2002, pp. 27-28)

Museums have many tools they can use to serve communities: collections, research, infrastructure, knowledge. However, engaging communities and building connections is no easy task, one complicated by forces outside the control of the museum. Museums find that using policy and action to embrace old roles also serves these new ones.

As this section has demonstrated, much of the literature in the museum field on civic engagement and community building focuses on macro-level social and economic trends. However, building and bridging social capital occurs at the micro level, among
individuals. In the context of museum communities, facilitating meaningful connections is the purview of staff and volunteers. Docents are one source museums may draw on to create these connections among visitors. When docent tours emphasize dialogue, they create spaces for the types of interactive experiences Christopher Gates outlined in *Mastering Civic Engagement*. Docents balance multiple viewpoints from (un)like visitors on one or many social issues perpetuated by a work of art.

*Bridges to Learning*

The museum’s historic role in educating the public was reasserted in 1992 when the American Association of Museums (AAM) published *Excellence and Equity*. This clarion call to arms charged museums with using all available resources - their collections, the knowledge of their staff, their programs – to serve the public. Specifically, *Excellence and Equity* called for “a new definition of museums as institutions of public service and education, a term that includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue” (AAM, 1992, p. 6). The report further asserted that “by making a commitment to equity in the public service, museums can be an integral part of the human experience, thus helping to create the sense of inclusive community so often missing in our society” (Ibid). Today, AAM’s accreditation process requires that “The museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role” (italics added; AAM, 2005, p. 1). The Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is required by its authorizing legislation to “encourage and support museums in carrying out their educational role, as core providers of learning and in conjunction with schools, families, and communities” (Public Law
In 2001 AAM conducted a public interest survey on trusted sources of information. Findings indicated that nine in ten Americans view museums trusted sources of objective information; no other institution or source had a comparable level of trust.

Museums responded to *Excellence and Equity*’s call for action by emphasizing and expanding the variety of educational programming available to visitors. Education programs are now specifically designed for children, teenagers, adults, families, and the community writ large. Museums have sought to increase participation in these programs by providing information about them through websites, newspapers, annual reports, and numerous other outlets. The variety of programming is such that it would be nearly impossible to find two museums that share the same exact roster of programs.

In 2003, the editors of Museum-Ed, Kris Wetterlund and Scott Sayre, conducted an online survey on the principle types of educational programs art museums offer and the structure of art museum education departments. Museum-Ed provides an online forum of tools and resources for museum educators (www.museum-ed.org). This survey was advertised over Museum-Ed’s listserv and drew responses from 85 art museums. It is not known how large the art museum sample size was, what percent of all art museums the respondents constitute, or if the sample was skewed by other external factors. These validity concerns preclude generalizability, but some responses were overwhelming and likely speak to common trends among the museum community. Figure 2.1 reports the percent of responding art museums that offer each type of educational program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Program</th>
<th>Type of Program</th>
<th>Respondent museums offering program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour Programs</td>
<td>Group tours</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialized tours for school groups</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Docent programs</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gallery guides</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple visit programs for schools</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-guided tours</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio tours</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Gallery Learning Programs</td>
<td>In-gallery information areas</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kid activity areas</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community, Adult, and Family Programs</td>
<td>Family days</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evening events for adults</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community festivals</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community advisory boards</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visiting artists/artist residencies</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialized programs for teens</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes and Other Public Programs</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classes for teachers</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classes for kids</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classes for adults</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer programs for kids</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Films</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Programs</td>
<td>Classroom materials</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-visit materials for teachers</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteers or staff in schools</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preschool programs</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video conferencing with schools</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Educational Programming</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online activities or lessons</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collections online</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.1: Percent of responding art museums that offer each type of education program
The survey results indicate that the programs museum education departments offer varies considerably, as does their popularity. This survey found that websites, lectures and group tours are the three educational activities offered by nearly every museum. While the number of visitors served by each program is not considered in this survey, research has looked closely at these types of statistics for other education programs. For example, the larger museum community, including national organizations, professional conferences, and literature, calls attention to the relationship between museums and schools. A report by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (2002), *True Needs, True Partners: Museums Serving Schools*, captured the extent of museum-school partnerships in 2000-2001 for all variety of museums.

Museums report continued increases in the number of schools, students, and teachers served in the past five years. Expenditures in support of K-12 education have grown to exceed a billion dollars annually. The median amount a museum spends on K-12 education has increased four fold in the past five years... They offer a wide range of programs and services from field trips and traveling exhibits to Web sites, videos and print materials. (p. i)

The Wetterlund and Sayre survey findings corroborate the extent of in-school visits by museum staff or volunteers, gallery tours, and curriculum, pre-visit and post-visit classroom materials. Museum and school partnerships are important because “they can connect students to ideas and experiences in direct, vivid, and meaningful ways” (IMLS, 2002, p. i). As the capacity of museums to offer high quality educational programs has grown, so too have efforts to evaluate these programs and demonstrate their value.

Research on museum visitors and learning in museums is not a 21st century phenomenon. For decades researchers have sought to understand the types of learning that occur in museums and how exhibits and programs can be constructed to convey ideas...
and information. Journals such as *Visitor Studies, Visitor Behaviors, Visitor Studies Today*, and the *Journal of Art Education* are filled with articles about ways to enhance visitor understanding and learning. The Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation is a standing AAM professional committee which focuses on “the process of systematically obtaining knowledge from and about museum visitors, actual and potential, for the purpose of increasing and utilizing such knowledge in the planning and execution of those activities that relate to the public” (AAM, 2008b).

The earliest efforts to understand museum-based learning “focused on short-term studies assessing the in-museum behavior or exit knowledge of visitors” (Falk & Dierking, 1995, p. 9). In the 1990s, the culture wars, calls for accountability, and the museum community’s own prioritization of education drove the need to “demonstrate [museums’] educational value to society and justify their very existence” (Ibid, p. 9). Recent efforts have focused on how visitors learn and how this learning enriches their lives. Researchers have concluded that museum learning is less like the formal education that takes place in schools and better defined as free choice and informal (see, Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Hein, 1998). Further, “the visitor, in addition to the exhibitor or programmer, contribute to the construction of his or her learning out of which he or she brought to the museum” (Falk & Dierking, 2000, pp. vii-viii). George Hein (1998) has applied the theory of Constructivism to museums and asserts that learners and groups of learners construct meaning and knowledge for themselves based on associations with what he or she already knows. Falk and Dierking (2000) developed the Contextual Model of Learning, which takes into account the overlapping personal, sociocultural and physical contexts of a museum visit.
As research continues to reinforce the role of the individual in museum learning, educators and researchers debate the most effective content and methods for teaching in museums. Kelly (2006) describes how this debate impacts the museum’s role.

There is a view that museums need to move from being suppliers of information to facilitators, providing tools for visitors to explore their own ideas and reach their own conclusions… In this sense, the museum needs to become a mediator of information and knowledge. (p. 1)

Numerous models for facilitating, not supplying, knowledge in museums have been developed. Two approaches gathering steam among museum educators, especially in art museums, are object-centered and inquiry-based learning. These approaches recognize that viewers come to museums with different backgrounds and levels of understanding but assert that the experience can be enhanced with assistance.

One method of object-centered learning in museums, Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), was developed based on the work of Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine (2001). VTS asks three questions: what is going on in this image? what do you see that makes you say that? and, what more can you find? The method shifts “the focus from what objects say to what people think,” and helps “to produce growth in viewing skills” (Rice & Yenawine, 2002, p. 291). This method is particularly effective when applied to art work that presents a narrative. Terry Barrett (1994) developed a set of principles for engaging individuals in interpretive dialogue about art. Some of these principles include: “No single interpretation is exhaustive of the meaning of an art-work and there can be different, competing, and contradictory interpretations of the same work;” “All art is in part about the world in which it emerged;” and “Interpretation is ultimately a communal endeavor” (Barrett, 1994, pp. 9-13). Barrett’s strategies for object-interpretation are
meant to increase an individual’s understanding about a work of art through a process of investigation.

Project Zero is a research group based in the Harvard Graduate School of Education that investigates cognitive development and the way children and adults learn. Project Zero’s mission is “to understand and enhance learning, thinking, and creativity in the arts, as well as humanistic and scientific disciplines, at the individual and institutional levels” (Project Zero, 2008a). One of the group’s studies, Project MUSE (Museums Uniting with Schools in Education), sought to shift the focus of museum-school learning from subject to learner. MUSE resulted in learning tools and approaches for educators that feature three foci (Project Zero, 2008b):

1. Inquiry: posing open-ended questions without right or wrong answers
2. Access: appealing to a wide range of learners; and
3. Reflection: providing opportunities for thinking about one's own thinking.

While Project MUSE focused on student learners, inquiry-based learning can be applied to all levels of learners. One of the model’s strengths is that it places the “learner at the center of the educational process, respecting the different ways in which an individual learns at various stages of life, as well as differences among individuals in the ways they perceive the world and express their ideas” (Project Zero, 2008a).

In “The Line of Inquiry: Questions for Adult Audiences,” Mustafa Ali Faruki (2003) considers the challenges and benefits of using inquiry strategies during gallery tours. Unlike children, adults are autonomous, self-directed learners who are able to draw on a broader set of experiences when understanding new ideas and concepts.
While a “question-less” gallery tour may offer learners a variety of facts related to museum objects… the asking of questions during adult-oriented tours is important not only in the promotion of self-directed learning, but also as a means of integrating audience experience into the learning process. (Ali Faruki, 2003, p. 9)

As object-centered and inquiry-based models of gallery learning demonstrate their effectiveness, the importance of docents to the museum experience increases.

Museums have numerous tools at their disposal to convey information: wall text, brochures, audio tours, and cell phone tours. Museums are also actively searching for new ways to engage visitors using today’s rapidly developing, interactive technology. However, human to human interaction is still the only way to engage learners in a line of inquiry that systematically builds on previous knowledge and guides visitors toward understanding. This learning experience is often the purview of docents who facilitate interactive experiences and provide tools for exploring objects and ideas during tours.

The debate among museum educators and researchers over the best way to facilitate learning in museums will continue for many years. However, as more museums adopt inquiry-based approaches, they surrender a single voice of institutional authority and make room for new perspectives, and potentially, new roles. In an editorial for Contest and Contemporary Society, Fiona Cameron (2006) characterizes museums as “centres for tolerance, as places for fostering critical thinking, problem solving and self reflexivity, and for visitor participation through dialogue with the institution and other visitors” (http://archive.amol.org.au/omj/volume8/volume8_index.asp). Of course, visitors do not need a guide to engage in conversation with their companions. However, docents are representatives of the museum who have extensive knowledge of the institution and its collection. In this role, docents can, in effect, engage visitors in a
dialogue with the museum. Cameron furthers that allowing additional voices that give meaning to objects need not diminish the museum’s time-honored role as a source of trusted information.

Cultural institutions…can act as trusted incubators for change by providing a range of information sources, offering challenging and participatory experiences but most importantly for museums to facilitate audiences to engage topics on their own terms in their capacity as expert informants as opposed to the older pedagogic paradigm as authorities. (italics added, 2006)

By creating participatory experiences in galleries, docents use the museum as a space of learning to further the institution’s public service role.

It is important to note that the traditional, lecture-style tour is still widespread in the docent community. Many docents lead tours that follow scripts with content similar to an art history course. Visitors may be asked if they have questions, but the purpose of the tour is for the docent to convey scholarly information about the art. Unlike discussion-based tours that encourage visitors to engage with one another and develop their own meanings, lecture-style tours inform visitors what academics have determined is important to know about the art. Andrew Pekarik (2008), a researcher at the Smithsonian Institution, recently observed two types of docents during his attendance at the 2007 National Docent Symposium: teachers and enthusiasts. Pekarik suggests that as teachers, docents “have learned to separate their own interests from those of the visitors and their central aim is to meet the needs of those visitors” (p. 147). This philosophy leads to dialogue and discussion among tour groups. As enthusiasts, docents “want to share with the visitor the specialized knowledge they have found fascinating” (Ibid). These docents are less likely to engage visitors during their tours. The ethos and prerogative of the
museum and program administrators ultimately decides the type of tour an institution will offer, and consequently the focus of docent training and pedagogy. It is likely that individuals will self-select into institutions whose pedagogy mirrors their preference.

As the benefits of discussion-based tours are researched and identified, museums seeking to change their pedagogy style will need guidance for transition, implementation, content, and administration. A recent chapter by Barbara Zolinger Sweney (2007), Educator for School and Docent Programs at the Columbus Museum of Art, in From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education in the 21st Century, provides much of this guidance. Sweney describes docents as “professional volunteers” and asserts that a “talented docent can help visitors discover that thinking and talking about art is enjoyable and worth doing” (p. 80). The chapter considers effective ways to train docents to “provoke dialogue and mediate meaning making for visitors” as well as strategies for recruitment, coordination, evaluation, and recognition (p. 80).

The successful 21st century museum is embracing new roles in the community and redefining old roles in education and inquiry. Each museum serves a distinctive and changing set of communities. Baby boomers, younger generations, and growing minority populations have unique needs, expectations, and measures for judging the value of museums. In response to their new public service role, museums are exploring the potential for civic engagement and finding they are rich with resources for building social capital. Concomitantly, museums are (re)asserting that education is at the center of their public service role. Research has sought to understand how people learn in the informal museum setting, what they learn, and how it enriches lives. A direct outcome of this research is the development of new models for learning in museums such as object-
centered and inquiry-based learning. These models emphasize dialogue and interaction among visitors, which increases the importance of museum guides in facilitating a conversation among school and adult groups that connect multiple viewpoints. In this context, docents can be viewed at the intersection of two of the museum’s most important roles: facilitators of community and learning.

The Museum Docent

A deeper understanding of the roles docents play in communities and enhancing visitor experiences may elevate museums’ appreciation of docents as a resource that can fulfill and expand their public service role. This section outlines the extent and variety of resources available to museum educators and docents who may be looking to develop or reenergize their programs. Because each docent program is different and comprehensive studies are unavailable, stand-alone articles are the primary data source for general trends in docent program administration and training. These articles suggest some of the most common motivations and rewards docents cite as well as familiar and innovative roles docents fill in museums. Finally, a profile of volunteers in the arts and of docents draws attention to the audience and potential audience for these programs.

Overview

A pragmatic and technical review of the literature on museum docents produced narrow results. Program administrators and docents themselves are the primary authors and audience for docent-related literature. This is reflected in the content, which focuses primarily on program management, recruitment, training, retention, and evaluation. Two
resources were identified that directly support the needs of docents and practitioners: the National Docent Symposium Council (NDSC) and The Docent Educator, a quarterly professional journal.

The purpose of the NDSC is “to provide docent education and the exchange of ideas through a National Docent Symposium, [where docents] participate in a dialogue about the role and mission of docents” (NDSC, 2007). A fully volunteer-run organization, NDSC hosts biannual symposiums and publishes newsletters and other topical literature. The theme for the April 2007 Symposium was Inviting Reflection, a topic that focused on improving skills as volunteer educators. The 2009 conference, to be held in Toronto, Canada will target Crossing Borders: Bridging Cultures. In 2001, NDSC published a third version of The Docent Handbook (Keller & Kramer), which is designed for docents of all experience levels, in all types museums. The Handbook is one of the primary sources for “how-to” docent topics such as learning styles, knowing your audience, and dealing with sensitive issues. The Council also administers a listserv where docents and practitioners can engage in a dialogue about questions and concerns in their professional environments.

The Docent Educator was a quarterly journal published for the museum educator community from 1991 until 2003; when the editor retired, no replacement was found. Its primary purpose was to “provide practical solutions to teaching with the collections of museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens” (Museum-Ed, 2007b). Each issue of the journal provided professional development resources for docents and museum educators to improve their teaching skills, touring techniques, and methods for connecting with different audiences. The topics addressed in these articles speak to the
professionalization efforts of the docent community, the amount of continuing education necessary to maintain quality docent services, and the docent’s commitment to enhancing the visitor’s experience. The Docent Educator also published a handful of articles addressing program organization, docent motivation, and rewards.

The near absence of discussion on docent programs in leading art and art education journals is surprising, as group tours are one of the most popular education programs art museums offer. Wetterlund and Sayre’s (2003) survey of museum education departments revealed that “group tours, along with family days and lectures, are the in-house programs most offered by art museum education departments” (p. 3). Indeed, 98 percent of those museums who responded indicated that they offer group tours; the only other services offered more were websites and lectures. The survey showed that museums offer the following types of tours (Ibid, p. 13):

- **Group**: public tours, special exhibition tours, permanent collection tours with or without a theme
- **Specialized**: tours with themes offered to school groups, or extended tours with a hands-on component
- **Multiple visit school programs**: connect with school curriculum or are a series on a specific topic
- **Self-guided**: printed materials for groups or programs for self-guided groups that require preregistration
- **Audio**: audio tours for the permanent collection or special exhibition
- **Self-tour gallery guides**: printed guides for individuals or groups
- **Other**: open-ended category

The classification system used in this survey represents a structure identified by the researchers. While group, specialized, and school tours require a docent guide, several of the tours captured in this survey (self-guided, audio, and gallery guides) do not. “Other” tours may or may not involve docent guides, the survey report did not itemize the findings for this category. Nevertheless, Wetterlund and Sayre’s (2003) survey provides
some indication of tour popularity. Figure 2.2 was adapted from the available raw data; it indicates the percent of museums reporting administration of each type of tour.

![Percent of responding art museums offering tours]

Figure 2.2: Type and frequency of tours offered by surveyed museums

The survey also indicated that docent programs are the sixth most common museum education offering: 92 percent of respondents offer docent training programs. This suggests that there is a significant audience for docent programs, both direct (the individuals who train to be docents) and diffuse (the visitors who take guided tours). No information was found in this survey, or from any other source, on the total number of volunteer docents in museums or visitors who take guided-tours.

*Docent Program Administration*

Every docent program is uniquely organized to meet an institution’s needs. Docent programs are generally housed in education departments and may be managed by
one or multiple museum staff members or a docent council. Components of such
programs vary in terms of initial and continuing training processes, requirements for
membership, the number of tours one must give, the benefits offered, and evaluations. A
variety of job descriptions, program guides, and recruitment letters have been posted by
museums on the Museum-Ed website (http://www.museum-ed.org). These documents are
a good resource for those seeking examples of docent program organization.

Of particular note here are basic training processes for docents. Despite their
variety, most docents programs share a common commitment to developing a high
quality corps of docent volunteers. This requires a significant investment of time and
resources on behalf of both museum and volunteer, and typically involves extensive
training and continuing education. Sweney (2007) describes an informal survey of model
docent programs she conducted in 1993 and trends in training practices.

Most of the formal docent candidate training programs emphasized art
history. However, there were also sessions on touring techniques including
different approaches to questioning, methods for learning to look, and
sensitivity to the special needs visitors of different ages, abilities, and
disabilities might have. The training was often at least 9 months to 1 year.
Volunteer docents were asked to commit at least one year after their
training to regular touring. (p. 83)

Docent programs provide a range of continuing education opportunities that enhance the
participants’ professionalization after their initial training sessions are completed.
Continuing education is offered through museum learning sessions, literature in the
museum education field, professional conferences, and even the docent’s own research. A
recent National Docent Symposium Council (NDSC) listserv discussion revealed that
some museums require attendance at these training sessions, some make it optional, and
still others reserve it for docents actively leading tours (personal communication, 2008).
Curator talks and refresher courses hosted by museums often focus specifically on a special exhibit or general “enrichment” sessions (Meier, 2008). Roundtable discussions at the most recent NDSC conference focused on developing methods for interactive tours, reaching specific audiences (such as groups with disabilities and high school students), encouraging community engagement, evaluating peers, and fostering staff-docent relationships.

The purpose of this extensive training and continuing education is to produce docents who can effectively lead guided tours that are central to the museum’s educational mission. The stated goals for docent tours and programs vary depending on the institution’s needs. Many museums require some form of evaluation in order to meet two goals: formalize the volunteer program and ensure high quality tours. The Museum-Ed website also provides several useful, sample evaluations posted by museums. However, the literature notes that not all programs conduct formal evaluations. Because docents and volunteers are unpaid and their time is donated, the subject of evaluation can be sensitive. Friedman-Fixler (2003) asserts that in performance evaluations, “volunteers are concerned about failing the organization they serve [and] supervisors worry about giving negative feedback to someone who works ‘for free’” (p. 1).

Despite this concern, volunteer and docent programs do, and should, evaluate participants. Sweney (2007) states that “[w]hile docents are unpaid, their conduct and contribution are expected to be professional” (p. 86). Some evaluations may address administrative concerns such as attendance and compliance with procedures, while tour evaluations typically focus on preparation, content, structure, presentation, effectiveness, and logistics (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2007a, p. 47). Regardless of their form or
content, volunteers should be informed at the start of their training that evaluations will take place, and clear, written guidelines and standards should be provided to clarify both parties’ expectations (see Sweney, 2007 and Gartenhaus, 1997). Sweney (2007) suggests self-evaluations, staff-evaluations, docent-to-docent evaluations, and visitor questionnaires as sources for feedback and constructive criticism.

Self-evaluations are required by some programs, but optional in others. Proponents of self-evaluations see them as “almost always a telling factor in the development of strong docents. Good docents are aware of what works and what doesn’t” (Young, 1997, p. 16). Sweney (2007) notes that self-evaluation from the beginning will “help [docents] keep an eye on the goals of their efforts and their success in meeting them” (p. 86). Peer evaluations of sample tours are also commonly utilized in docent programs. Young (1997) argues that group peer feedback should be positive, so that it “exposes new docents to the process of evaluation…and gives them the benefit of the ‘older’ docents’ valuable experiences” (p. 14). Mentor docents are seen as effective evaluators, but Sweney (2007) notes that it is important to develop such a process in collaboration with docents and that “all parties must respect confidentiality” (p. 87). Littleton cautions that the success of these evaluations depends on the individual’s commitment to improving their performance. Those “that are serious about improving their performance, and about providing…an optimum tour experience will see this…dialogue as an essential part of the tour” (Littleton, 1998, p. 19).

Other articles advocated giving docents the opportunity to evaluate the docent program, including supervision, content, and structure. This allows docents to invest in the program and can open lines of communication between volunteers and staff that
improves the program (Gartenhaus, 1997). Whichever evaluations are used, they must be used in combination with ongoing supervision. Friedman-Fixler (2003) asserts that supervision gives volunteers an “opportunity to grow closer to staff and to receive recognition, coaching and counseling” (p. 1). Supervision can improve accountability, performance, and volunteer retention. The effectiveness of program evaluation and supervision will depend upon many factors, including the individual supervisor and his or her responsiveness to input.

Research exploring the relationship between docents and visitors or docents and teachers were almost absent from the literature. A single study was found comparing visitor enjoyment of lecture style tours compared to enjoyment of inquiry and discussion-based tours (Horn, 1980). The study prepared docents to give each type of tour then asked visitors to complete questionnaires rating their enjoyment of tours, instructional style, interaction with a docent, and interaction with other visitors in their group (p. 109). The study found that, in general, participants preferred the inquiry and dialogue-based tour. A Master’s thesis by Keonna Hendrick (2007) surveyed teacher and docent perceptions of objectives and support of pedagogy for the Columbus Museum of Art’s ARTful Reading program. Hendrick found that docents and teachers value the program but that consistent communication and a clear understanding about each party’s expectations are necessary to actualize programmatic goals. No studies were found examining visitor motivations for taking guided tours or what visitors learn from tours. Numerous methods for evaluation are used in docent programs. Each institution must select the most convenient, but effective, combination of evaluation methods to improve the program for the benefit of docent, staff, and visitor.
Motivation

What motivates an individual to commit himself or herself to the training and hours of service required to be a volunteer museum docent? No systematic studies were found that surveyed docents about their motivation for participating in museum education. However, anecdotal evidence collected from docents and museum educators suggests an interest in the subject matter and lifelong learning opportunities are two of the primary reasons individuals have for joining the “prestige circuit of volunteerdom” (Bleck, 1980, p. 19). One docent described this interest: “I hadn’t the faintest idea of what I was getting into, but I loved history and the few art history courses I took in college. That ‘docent business’ sounded interesting, and so, there I was” (Brown, et al, 2000, p. 17). Practitioners are aware of these motivations, “[Docents] may come at first, and continue to come, for the training that your institution offers, a chance for them to learn and grow personally” (Littleton, 1998, p. 6; see also Gartenhaus, 1998 and Copeman, 1998).

In addition to basic and continuing training sessions, museums report a multitude of learning opportunities for their docents. These can include access to the museum library, connections with universities that allow volunteers to audit courses, joint trainings with other docent corps, talks with experts, and field trips (see Johnson, 1998 and Birck, 1998). For students already in a learning situation at the primary, secondary, or university level, docent programs may serve as a fun extracurricular activity or a way to explore a new professional field (Gesek, 2000). The addition of a knowledge-intensive extra curricular activity speaks to the students’ interest in, and commitment to, learning.
The literature on motivations for volunteering in museums is more substantial, and Alan Gartenhaus (1998) contends that docents and general volunteers in museums share similar motivations. In a survey of its extensive volunteer force, the Smithsonian Institution observed the following motivations: give back to society and belief in the institution’s mission, interaction with visitors and helping people, friendship and a sense of belonging, and staying active in retirement (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2007a, pp. 52-53). In a comprehensive review of the literature on volunteering, Bussell and Forbes (2001) echo the Smithsonian’s findings and also cite the desire to make a difference in the organization and learning skills that might be useful in a future career (p. 249).

Because motivation is related to recruitment, retention, and satisfaction, it is important for all programs that utilize volunteers to understand the reasons these individuals give their time to a specific institution. The American Association of Museums recently published a useful resource for practitioners developing and nurturing a volunteer force, *Transforming Museum Volunteering: A Practical Guide to Engaging 21st Century Volunteers* (Hirzy, 2007).

*An Rewarding Experience*

An important component of volunteer participation and retention relates to the rewards and benefits offered by an institution. Anecdotal reports from museum education staff and docents cite a wide array of benefits that keep them engaged and dedicated to the museum (see, for example, Birck, 1998; Copeman, 1998; Gartenhaus, 1998; and Brown, et al., 2000). Many of these benefits are connected to the motivations that originally led to an individual’s interest in docentry. The easiest benefits to identify are
tangible and run the gamut from name tags, museums store discounts and free guest passes to parking passes, newsletters, and discounted or complementary memberships. These basic benefits are often the most valued and can go a long way in making volunteers feel respected and appreciated. The Smithsonian Institution’s study of its volunteers confirmed that some of the “most prized benefits of volunteering appeared to be special access to Smithsonian facilities—being able to go on behind-the-scenes tours, skirt long lines with their badges, and park” (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2007, p. 54). Sweney (2007) prefers to recognize years of service and boost morale with social events.

Intangible benefits such as interaction with fellow docents and visitors, appreciative museum staff, the variety of work, and the work itself are equally important to volunteer museum docents. Copeman (1998) posits that “continuing education not only offers the volunteers a chance to learn more, it fosters social interaction” (p. 8). Many individuals become docents to socialize with people who share similar interests. In an article entitled “3 Docents, 70 Years of Experience” (Brown, et al., 2000), two docents share the importance of the relationships they formed with colleagues. The first noted, “The friendships I made with a diverse group of docents, the opportunity to tour and talk with visitors from many different parts of the world [are] among the many rewards I received as a docent” (p. 18). The second sated, “Among the many reasons I have remained a docent for twenty-seven years, [one is] the enormous intellectual stimulation of working with a group of intelligent and caring women” (p. 18). This comment calls attention to the gendered history of museum docents. Since the inception of docent programs in America, docents have traditionally been female, white, and from the upper-middle class, a profile that will be explored in more detail in a later section. However, it
is worth noting that the gender bias of the docent community may be a draw for women seeking companionship with other women.

Not surprisingly, docents find great reward in their primary task, guiding tours and facilitating connections between visitors and objects. One docent writes,

The rewards come from our visitors. It makes every struggle worthwhile when a young girl, who is part of a severely disabled group in wheelchairs, tells me in a halting voice which paintings touched her most, and how she will envision them when she needs a lift. (Brown et al., 2000, p. 17)

Another docent describes the rewarding feeling of connecting with visitors of all ages.

There are also those special moments when I know my efforts have made a small difference—when a child makes a connection with an art work; when children ask if they can come back again; when I get a group of teenagers to actually engage in discussion…These are some of the intangible, but very real, rewards of being a volunteer docent. (Brown, et al, 2000, p. 18)

Visitor engagement and enjoyment are often cited as primary goals for docent programs.

Docents also point to the extra efforts by staff members who make the experience worthwhile. One of the most important things administrators can do is encourage personal growth and infuse the program with value by giving back to volunteers. Staff gestures can include thank you notes, passing along “fan mail” from visitors, service pins, and annual recognition events. Slavin (1998) noted that if these recognition events allow docents to partake in the planning, it will “keep in line with a collegial program and support [the docent program’s] mission to be a ‘community of learners’” (p. 14). Hager and Brudner (2004) looked at volunteer retention among charity organizations and found that good management practice centers on enriching the volunteer experience. In addition to recognition and professional development, organizations can “provide a culture that is
welcoming to volunteers, allocate sufficient resources to support them, and enlist volunteers in recruiting other volunteers” (Hager & Brudner, 2004, p. 1). Gartenhaus (1998) connects the importance of appreciation with a flourishing program.

The difference between a volunteer corps that thrives from one that simply survives is immense. It is a difference that will have a real impact upon the quality of institutional programming. Docents who are appreciated, who know that they are respected for their efforts and the work they do, have a better ‘self-image’ than those who perceive feelings of ambivalence or disdain. (p. 4)

Recognizing that docents give their time and efforts generously will keep docents involved and be reflected in the quality of their tours. In general, docents indicate that the experience offers many benefits. One docent put it this way, “The lasting friendships I have made, the ongoing education, the excitement of new intellectual challenges, the opportunity to work with children and use the museum’s marvelous collection keep me returning” (Brown, et al, 2000, p. 18).

A common thread running through several of the rewards noted by docents and practitioners is a sense of community, both within the museum and at large. Docents appreciate feeling like a part of the “museum family,” as respected members of the institution’s workforce and as trusted stewards of the collections. Benefits such as identification badges and behind-the-scenes access reinforce this feeling. Complimentary or discounted museum memberships and program tickets not only make docents feel appreciated, they build the museum’s constituency. Docents will come to the museum not just for tours, but to explore additional offerings and deepen their connection to the museum’s community; they may even bring friends and family. Other rewards such as new friendships and making connections with visitors speak to a larger sense of
community. To the extent docents and visitors share similar traits with one another, these connections are examples of bonding and bridging social capital.

**Exploring Docent Roles**

The first museum docent in America was employed in 1907 by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Benjamin Ives Gilman, then the museum’s Secretary, asserted that “art museums needed interpreters to enhance the visitor’s experience” (Blackmon, 1981, p. 297). A description of the museum instructor from *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* in 1916 described the role of the docent as “bent on placing its treasures as completely as possible within reach of the public— or, more often, on stimulating the public to do a little reaching” (Whitmore, p. 198). While it has undergone immense professionalization, in some ways this role has not changed. The term docent comes from the Latin word, *docere*, meaning to guide or to teach. At their core, docents are educators who enrich knowledge and facilitate connections between visitors and objects. Barbara Sweney (2007) describes docents as “museum teachers with a set of pedagogical and performance skills adapted to the museum setting” (p. 80). In these roles, docents play an essential role in carrying out the museum’s educational mission.

In 2005 Stephen Weil ruminated on the possibility for enrichment that comes from experiencing visual art to a crowd of museum educators in Columbus, Ohio. He observed that the docent’s task is to ensure gallery conversation considers the full range of possible connections between visitor and art object. When individuals connect a work of art with something significant in their life, they make their own meaning, instead of one dictated by the museum. The research cited earlier by Falk and Dierking (2000) and
Hein (1998) speaks to the increasing validity and acceptance of personal meaning making in the museum. To this end the docent’s role can also be seen as “a catalyst between viewers and exhibits” (Wollins, et al., 1986, p. 42). Docents have always been charged with making connections between visitors and objects. One of America’s earliest docents, Elizabeth Whitmore (1916), espoused that in striving to build a rapport between visitor and object that lasts beyond the length of a tour, the docent is “helping fulfill the peculiar purpose of his chosen institution, the museum” (p. 200). Guided tours that increase visitor understanding and enjoyment further the museum’s educational and public service roles. The expectation and hope is that this connection will encourage visitors to return to the museum.

Docents can also serve practical roles that contribute to the museum’s operation. The Smithsonian Institution’s study of its volunteer corps (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2007a) found that while many volunteers have rich backgrounds from their professional careers and/or other volunteer positions, the Institution rarely taps this knowledge. The report recommends drawing on this experience to improve programs: “The many who volunteer elsewhere can see how volunteer programs are run at other organizations and can share innovations or best practices with which they have first-hand experience” (p. 58). Hrbek (2000) asserts that drawing on docent expertise improves retention rates: “When docents are used as a resource for program development their participation and quality levels will stay very high” (p. 12).

A Senior Social Analyst in the Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Policy and Analysis, Andrew Pekarik (2008), contends that docents can be valuable assets in helping museums conduct basic visitor studies.
Docents who are at ease with electronic communication, such as e-mail or an intranet, might create lists of Frequently Asked Questions (with answers researched by both docents and professional staff). Constructing such lists is a process of listening to visitors; it can also provide insights into the mindsets visitors bring to the museum. Educators, senior docents, or docent mentors could present detailed suggestions and teaching techniques found to be effective in the current galleries or with objects on display. And docents could be encouraged to share interesting visitor responses. (pp. 148-149)

Docents who are trained to foster group conversation in galleries are museum professionals naturally positioned to collect information from visitors. The role of docent researcher is rarely (if ever) utilized in museums. However, with the proper training, instruments, and approach, docent research might illuminate many new, and perhaps surprising, insights for museums.

By leading guided tours, docents create something museums strive to provide for visitors: an interactive, social, enriching experience. Falk and Dierking (2000) assert that “humans build knowledge and understanding through conversation” and learning in museums is a sociocultural experience (p. 38). The researchers further that the process of meaning making occurs in a community of learners who bring their own knowledge, experience, and opinions to a conversation. Falk and Dierking state that “sociocultural mediation…plays a critical role in personalizing the museum experience for visitors, facilitating their efforts to learn and find meaning” (Ibid, p. 109). Provided they utilize a discussion-based format, docents mediate multiple narratives during interactive social experiences that enhance the experience and make it personally meaningful to visitors.

The key component of these learning experiences is the human element. Other tools developed by museums to provide educational content include catalogues, wall labels, gallery handouts and audio guides. While these tools can utilize elements of
inquiry-based pedagogies, they typically convey a fixed set of facts. Docents are able to react and field questions that visitors develop as they progress through the museum, something audio tours cannot provide. Sweney (2007) contends,

The best interactivity an art museum can provide is the sort provided by human contact. A trained docent, engaged in listening closely to a small group of visitors and making lively conversation, can help them make connections between works of art and their own experiences (p. 80).

Museums are beginning to experiment with new, interactive technologies to engage visitors in the galleries so the experience becomes less one-sided. However, this digital medium still lacks the human touch and may be inaccessible to patrons who are less technologically proficient. Docents who create meaningful and memorable experiences for visitors contribute to the museum’s competitive edge in the cultural experience and market economies.

Docents also fill important roles as community ambassadors. Gartenhaus (2000) suggests that of all museum volunteers, it may be docents who have the most “direct impact on visitors, and the most profound effect upon the public’s perception of the institution” (p. 2). In a discussion on art museums and the public, the Smithsonian Institution asserted,

If a museum wants to seriously address its public role, it needs to find a way to engage in an extensive, prolonged, multi-faceted dialogue with that public. There needs to be a way for the museum to listen, especially to those who do not believe that the museum has anything to offer them. (italics added, Office of Policy and Analysis, 2001, p. 14)

This community dialogue already takes place informally when docents represent the museum and lead visitors through the institution’s halls. A formal recognition of these
efforts might provide museums with another conduit for connecting and responding to its communities.

This section argues that docents are a specialized resource and audience for the museum. Of all the motivations cited by docents, one of the most frequent is their interest in increasing knowledge and understanding about art and life. It is likely this passion carries over into other parts of their lives and is recognized by those around them. Pekarik (2008) has found that docent programs not only build audiences, they contribute to word-of-mouth marketing.

The devoted good will of these learners can expand through the community. As they become more deeply involved, they share their excitement with others and are living examples of the way that the museum can make a difference in the lives of individuals. (p. 148)

Docents who bring friends, family and colleagues to a museum contribute to its audience development. These educators, learners, facilitators of experience, researchers, and community ambassadors might be seen as a museum’s greatest return on investment. Museums must now ask themselves how they can innovatively expand and adapt this resource to increase and deepen community connections.

Profile of a Museum Volunteer

The time and resources that volunteers contribute help museums to operate. In 2006 The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) reported that museums involve volunteers because it allows them to provide programs and services they would not normally be able to offer, save money that would be spent on paid staff, and increase staff diversity (p. 3). The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) reported that more than 1.6 million people volunteered with arts or cultural organizations in 2005, roughly 2.4
percent of the 65.4 million volunteers in America (Nichols, 2007, p. 1). The NEA does not gather information on the number of volunteer docents (nor does any other source). However, the NEA does report on types of activities performed by arts and culture volunteers. Two categories represent the closest proxies for docent activities: 13.8 percent of arts and culture volunteers primarily tutor or teach and 12.6 percent primarily mentor youth (Ibid, p. 8). In a survey of its Visitor Information Services Department, the Smithsonian Institution reported that docents represent roughly 20 percent of volunteers, second only to the behind-the-scenes volunteers who represent 26 percent of volunteers (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2007, p. 165). These numbers suggest that docents represent a large contingent of museum volunteers.

Who are these specialized museum volunteers? In 1980 Charles Bleick described the docent as “almost always female, and characteristically from the white, upper-middle class segment of the community” (p. 19). Nearly three decades later, that statement is still fairly accurate. Andrew Pekarik (2008) asserts that the reason the “majority of docents are female, older, white, and retired” is likely two-fold: their availability for volunteer work and the format of training programs (p. 148). The length of training programs and scheduled training times (typically weekday working hours) excludes many in the workforce, including young people and those with children. According to Pekarik, museums are beginning to reach broader demographics by removing some of these obstacles. Specific approaches include scheduling training on weekends or evenings, requiring fewer hours to maintain active docent status and training docents in specific areas of the museum when background knowledge exists.
Some museums have begun to adopt creative recruitment approaches in order to diversify their volunteer corps. For example, the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery recently recruited younger volunteers by advertising on Craigslist.com, a networking website, and contacting several young professional organizations in the area (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2007, p. 26). The Smithsonian’s volunteer department also participates in unconventional recruiting events such the National Zoo’s Fiesta Musical, Asia Heritage Festival, Black Family Reunion on the National Mall, USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Fair at the White House, and Smithsonian Teachers’ Night (Ibid., p. 27). As volunteer corps diversify, they extend word-of-mouth advertising to previously unengaged segments of the community.

One way docent programs have been able to diversify their demographics and build relationships with school and university partners is with student docent programs. Museums of all disciplines have developed student docents programs for all ages. For example,

- Pasadena Museum of History, grades 7 and 8, founded 1988 (http://www.pasadenahistory.org/programs_events/juniordocent.html)
- Garfield Park Conservatory, high school students, founded 2006 (http://www.garfield-conservatory.org/teen_programs.htm)
- Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, high school students, founded 1999; university student component added 2007 (http://www.uoregon.edu/~uoma/education/university/documents/univstudentdocent.pdf)

One model was found for museums seeking to develop student docent programs and partnerships with schools. In 2004 the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art created the
Aldrich Student Docent Program Development Kit (Carlson & McDonald). The kit is sold online and provides advice on program development, including structure, curriculum, and evaluation. It also includes a DVD, handbook, and sample materials.

I found two articles that documented the benefits of student docent programs to participants and museums (see Choi, 1998 and Gesek, 2000). Through docent experiences students learn volunteer habits and improve life-skills such as communication, responsibility and leadership. They revel in serving as role models to other students and getting behind-the-scenes access. Choi (1998) asserts that junior docents promote richer relationships between younger children and the museums they once viewed as “a stuffy building with a bunch of rules” (p. 46). This engagement can build the museum’s audience and provide another avenue for school and museums to extend partnerships beyond the one-time field trip.

Absent from the literature is a consideration of qualities unique to college and university student docent programs. Such programs involve young adults preparing to enter the professional workforce with irregular schedules and numerous demands on their time. Docent programs with primary or secondary students typically involve a partnership between two unrelated institutions. However, the museum’s location (on or off campus) and depth of the connection between museum and university might have implications for program goals, administration, and impact. University students will likely experience several of the rewards that all docents report (e.g. enhanced communication skills and behind-the-scenes access); they might also identify rewards unique to their age group. Museums who offer university student docent programs might cite similar goals such as diversifying docent corps and stimulating the interest of new audiences; they may also
pursue goals related to the campus and its mission. No quantification of university student docent programs exist. However, those seeking to establish, expand, or reformat such programs should understand the associated benefits, challenges, and values.

Generational Attitudes Toward Volunteering

In considering the position of student docents, in a field where the majority of participants are older, generational attitudes toward volunteering become relevant. A generation refers to a cohort of people born into and shaped by a unique era in history; the naming of generations typically refers to historical or social events that shaped them. While there is no consensus on specific beginning and ending dates for each generation, this paper utilizes the classifications Neil Howe and William Strauss use in their book, *Millenial’s Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000). Figure 2.3 identifies the birth years for each generation, their current age range, and their ages in 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Birth years</th>
<th>Age Range in 2008</th>
<th>Age Range in 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millenial</td>
<td>1982 – 2002</td>
<td>6 – 26</td>
<td>18 – 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>1943 – 1960</td>
<td>48 – 65</td>
<td>60 – 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Baby Boom</td>
<td>Pre-1943</td>
<td>66 +</td>
<td>78 +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3: Classification of generations by birth year

Scores of research have addressed volunteerism across generations, a topic beyond the scope of this paper. According to the Corporation for National & Community Service (2005), one-third of the Baby Boomer generation volunteered for an organization, the
highest of any demographic group. These numbers are expected to rise as the Boomers begin to retire. Generation X is considered to be the most cynical, detached and least civically engaged. The Millennial generation, also known as Generation Y, Generation Next, and iGen, is identified as optimistic, increasingly accepting of diversity, and driven by technology. Millennials are poised to fill the shoes of retiring Baby Boomers and are expected to be community service-oriented and concerned about contributing to society and the public good. Today museums are actively looking for ways to engage each generation through accessibility, programming, technology, and volunteering (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2007b).

While some of these outreach programs are designed to appeal to one generation, others may be developed to engage and partner multiple generations. A report by the International Longevity Center (2005) states that intergenerational programs provide “intentional and systematic contact between the young and the old to benefit both populations” (p. 5). The same report stipulates that a successful intergenerational program in the arts and humanities “integrates people of all ages into its activities, providing all participants and staff with opportunities to learn from one another and, through art, to build a supportive community for all involved” (p. viii). These new communities lead to many shared benefits such as socializing, idea sharing, skill and knowledge building, and personal support. In most museums, intergenerational programs are limited to specific education activities such as family days. However, student docent programs that involve a mentorship, pairing younger and older generations together during the training and touring process, reflect the type of program that leads to
sustained, shared benefits. Few researchers have explored the perceptions, roles, and experiences of various age groups participating in intergenerational docent programs.

The University Museum

In his historic 1942 essay, *College and University Museums*, then President of the American Association of Museums, Lawrence Vail Coleman asserted that “Museums for use are the only museums worth while...The campus museum should be, above all, an instrument of teaching or research, or of both” (pp. 4-5). Coleman believed the primary audiences for campus museums are the faculty and students attending the university, not those in surrounding areas. Coleman went so far as to state, “Public service is all right as a subordinate function if it can be rendered without prejudice to academic work” (p. 5). Over six decades later, university museums have reassessed this position amid transitions in the museum field and academic community. Many university museums are now mandated by their missions to reach out to the community. However, expectations that university museums should serve communities beyond the campus have meant balancing and adapting to different stakeholder needs.

The Association of College and University Museums and Galleries (ACUMG) was organized in 1980 to address issues relevant and unique to these institutions. Issues of concern include “governance, ethics, education and exhibitions, management, strategic planning, support, collections, and professional programs” (ACUMG, 2008). Annual conference topics include: *Purposeful Discourse: Interdisciplinarity and the Empowerment of the University Museum* (2008) and *Credibility, Culpability, and the Public Trust: Current Issues in University and College Museums* (2007). Another
association, the International Committee of University Museums and Collections (ICUMC), will hold its annual conference entitled, *University Museums and the Community*, in September 2008. In the conference’s description ICUMC asserts that more and more universities are recognizing the integral roles they play in the cultural, economic and social development of their communities.

Increasingly, university museums and galleries have become a vital link between universities and their communities. They are important sources of learning outside the classroom for schools and colleges, as well as places of informal learning for visitors of all kinds; they are vehicles for public engagement with academic research; and increasingly they are becoming places where the university can listen to the community and its views on the issues studied by academics. (ICUMC, 2008)

Although this discussion reflects shifts in the audiences served by university museums, these institutions are shaped first and foremost by the university that supports them.

In 2004 the University Museums UK Group published *University Museums in the United Kingdom: A National Resource in the 21st Century*. The report discussed the role of university museums and the context in which they operate. University museums are able to draw on unique resources that allow them to fill many roles that include, but are not limited to the following.

- **Research**: exhibitions, outreach, conservation, documentation
- **Teaching**: museum staff and object-based learning
- **Access**: removing or reducing “physical, cultural, social, financial, intellectual, psychological and emotional barriers” (p. 14)
- **Lifelong Learning**: all visitors can potentially make connections with art and programs that engage volunteers offer additional opportunities for learning
- **Community Engagement**: “the best university museums offer a welcoming and comparatively undaunting gateway to the university and play a role in local and regional life” (p. 17)
- **Relationships and Partnerships**: museums are well suited to work with community organizations, both locally and afar
Each university museum is unique in terms of mission, governance, operations, and collections. According to the University Museums UK Group report, principle funding for a university museum comes from the university and is supplemented by endowments, income generation, research grants, project support, and sponsorship. Support varies widely, but campus museums are ultimately controlled by the university and typically report to an appointed board or committee made up of individuals from within the university. The staffing structure of campus museums is also highly variable, but “[i]n many cases curatorial staff are members of faculty and have a combined curatorial and academic role” (University Museums UK Group, 2004, p. 32). This basic blueprint for university museum operations suggests substantial control by and accountability to the university that must be increasingly balanced with the expectations of an external public. As noted, each institution varies and this brief description is not intended to describe the relationship of all university museums with their academic counterpart.

The Wexner Center for the Arts shares several of a conventional university museum’s goals, but a distinctive governance structure increases the institution’s autonomy. The center’s mission and activities affirm several of the roles cited by the University Museums UK Group: research, lifelong learning, community engagement, and partnerships. Unlike many university museums, the center is not fully governed by The Ohio State University or any one college or department. Structurally, the Wexner Center is a non-academic unit located in the Office of Academic Affairs and the Director reports to the provost. The university provides funding for staff members and maintenance support. However, the Wexner Center Foundation is the center’s main fundraising arm and is not connected to the university. The Foundation has its own staff and board of
trustees. This independent structure allows the center to set its own priorities, such as developing an international profile or omitting traditional university museum activities such as showing student and faculty art work. The Wexner Center’s Director of Education, Shelly Casto, asserts that the relationship between the center and the university works because the campus is so large; smaller universities are likely to have a more substantial influence on all departments and affiliates (personal communication, February 15, 2008). The relationship between the Wexner Center and The Ohio State University will be explored throughout this thesis.

Conceptual Framework

A variety of economic and social trends over the past several decades have led to a paradigm shift in the role museums fill in American society. The successful 21st century museum is driven by service to communities and educational missions. Museums are developing ways to engage in an open dialogue with their communities and finding they are a vital source of social capital. They are serving as facilitators of civic engagement, agents of social change, and moderators of sensitive social issues. Museums are also reaffirming old roles and drawing on all their resources to serve as spaces of learning. Seen as one of the most trusted sources of information, museums offer a variety of educational programs to engage visitors from all demographics. Research has established that learning in museums is free choice, informal, and constructed from personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts. In light of these findings, museum educators have begun to develop new models for learning in galleries and engage in debate over their effectiveness. Two of these pedagogies, object-centered and inquiry-based learning,
emphasize dialogue and interaction among visitors.

This chapter has argued that docents serve museums at the center of their public service and educational roles. Docents are a highly specialized and tremendously committed audience for museums as both service recipients and providers. Docents participate in rigorous training programs and deliver one of the museum community’s most offered programs: gallery tours. Docents and docent programs that utilize discussion-based tour formats engage visitors in a dialogue with the art and one another, placing the visitor at the center of the interpretive and meaning-making role. By empowering them through a facilitated conversation, docents aim to increase understanding, interest, and connections among visitors. However, many docent programs still rely on a lecture-style tour format that seldom actively involves the visitor. Additionally, many docents are female, older, white, upper-middle class, and retired. Museum educators are partnering with schools and universities to develop student docent programs that break these stereotypes and engage new audiences from their local communities. These programs have developed with few models for guidance and limited attention from the field.

All organizations must use their resources wisely and demonstrate their value to funders and the public. My thesis research aims to explore the value associated with a student and community docent program on a university campus to its participants, the Wexner Center, and the community. An assessment of the Wexner Center for the Arts docent program’s administration and pedagogy is intended to guide the development, expansion, or formalization of similar programs. A consideration of the docent corps’ shared, lived experience will inform the discussion of the training pedagogy’s perceived
effectiveness, the docent’s role at the Wexner Center and the value of bridging the campus and center communities. This research seeks to push the field forward with sound suggestions for administering a student and community docent program and justifications for systems of financial and institutional support for such programs. Viewed as important resources for fulfilling both public service and education missions, museums may consider docents one of their most solid, long-term investments.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to gain a thorough understanding of the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Specifically, this research explores the value of an uncommon docent program, one that engages and serves members from the central Ohio community and the student body at The Ohio State University. The following questions will guide a process and summative evaluation of the program.

- What attributes make (or do not make) this program successful?
- Is the program achieving its stated mission and goals?
- What role does the docent program fill at the Wexner Center?
- What value does the program hold for the docents, the Wexner Center, and the community?
- What improvements, if any, can be made?
- What are the implications of student and community docent programs for the museum education field?

The process evaluation will consider the docent program’s mission, goals, administration, training content, and current evaluation efforts, from the perspective of Wexner Center staff. I will also interview practitioners of other docent programs, to collect their thoughts on the significance of student docent programs in the museum education field. As both service recipients and service providers, docents are considered the primary participants in this research. While visitors are the primary audience for docent-led tours, they are only indirect recipients of the docent program’s training content and administration, the focus of this research. Therefore, the summative
evaluation examines the program from the docents’ perspective. Included in this examination are docent perceptions of motivation, training, the docent’s role, rewards, and characterizations of the partnership between the Wexner Center and The Ohio State University. To illuminate the values of the docent program to participants, I will cross-examine literature and trends from the field with viewpoints, insights, and opinions of Wexner Center staff, docents, other docent program practitioners, and my own experiences and observations. I will also assess the alignment between staff goals and perspectives with those of the docents as a measure of program success, and as an avenue for identifying good practices.

Design Overview

This thesis will employ a case study research methodology that closely examines organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal attributes of the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Robert Stake (2003) describes a “zone of combined purpose” between intrinsic and instrumental case studies, where the researcher’s interest is both in the particular and the general (p. 137). As a student at The Ohio State University, and a patron of the Wexner Center, I embarked on this research because, intrinsically, “in all its particularity and ordinariness this case itself is of interest” (Ibid, p. 136). Concurrently, as an arts administrator, advocate, educator, and leader, I chose to conduct an instrumental study case because it seeks to advance understanding and “provide insight into an issue” (Ibid, p. 137). The primary issues in this case concern the administration of a museum education docent program comprised of intergenerational volunteers in the arts and docents as sources of learning and social capital. Although the Wexner Center for the
Arts is a multidisciplinary institution, docents only conduct gallery and architecture tours. Occasionally, they are involved in other educational programming, such as annual Family Days, but they are not involved in the film, dance, or music presentations at the center.

This case study is complex as a result of the docent program’s placement within a multitude of fluid environments: the Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University campus, and local, regional, statewide, national, and international communities. I will use multiple research methods to reduce the likelihood of misinterpreting participant voices, to clarify meaning, and to deepen the understanding of why the docent program exists as it does. Numerous researchers (Walcott, 1988, Yin, 1994, and Stake, 2003) have discussed the importance of triangulating data in order to increase the validity of analyses. Yin (1994) asserts,

The most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry…Thus, a finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode. (p. 98)

A review of the literature will contextualize the docent program at the Wexner Center in the larger museum community. Three additional methodologies will be used to richly describe the research subjects’ standpoints, behaviors, and depth of engagement: participant observation, autoethnography, and narrative interviews.

Participant Observation and Autoethnography

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) define participant observation as “research that involves social interaction between the researcher and informants in the milieu of the later, during which data are systematically and unobtrusively collected” (p. 24). As a
participant observer in this study I enrolled in the docent training program at the Wexner Center during the fall 2007 and winter 2008 quarters at The Ohio State University. I received five academic credits for my participation in the fall term and two credits in the winter. Students, including myself, who continue training into the spring and beyond, do not receive academic credit. Once training is completed, students may be paid for their service.

Robert Labaree (2002) surveyed the participant observation literature and identified four advantages of a researcher’s “insiderness” (p. 98). These four broad benefits involve 1) shared experiences, 2) greater access, 3) cultural interpretation, and 4) deeper understanding and clarity of thought for the researcher (Ibid, p. 103). I enrolled in the course to experience the Wexner Center’s docent training first-hand. This allowed me to gain access to the staff, other docents, and training materials, understand the culture of this docent program, and systematically reflect on my findings, which I subsequently analyzed. I also felt strongly that I could not adequately or authoritatively analyze this program without a full understanding of the docent’s experience. The visibility of a participant observer is often considered along a continuum from overt to covert (see Taylor & Bogdan, 1998 and Labaree, 2002). I sought to be transparent in this study by fully disclosing my motivations and process with Wexner Center staff and other docents.

As a participant in the docent training program, I am more than an ethnographer who gains insights by observing and documenting an unfamiliar culture. I am an autoethnographer who trains and works as a member of the docent community, researching my own experience as an object of study. Barbara Tedlock (2003) states, “[w]riting for and about the community in which one has grown up and lived, or at least
achieved some degree of insider status, should produce engaged writing centering on the ongoing dialectical political-personal relationship between self and other” (p. 184). To foster this dialogue, Valeria Janesick (2003) identifies “the act of journal writing as a rigorous documentary tool... [that promotes reflection] on the research process” (p. 67). I operationalized these recommendations through several writing exercises that were required for the training class and a personal experience journal that dialogued my experience of the research setting and process. Ellis and Bochner (2000) assert that autoethnography is a means of understanding the self and others through self-exploration and self-questioning. I used this experience to satisfy my personal interests, provide an insider’s perspective on the program, and subject those insights to critical analysis.

A major concern for researchers engaged in autoethnographic studies is safeguarding against biases, self-absorption, and/or skewing data findings. Patti Lather (1986) argues “there is no neutral research” because one’s self (e.g. history, experience, feeling) can never truly be separated from the research process (p. 41). As a postpositivist, Lather argues for research as praxis, exploring openly ideological and/or self-interested research. I describe my interest in this project extensively in Chapter One. My position is that docents are essential intermediaries for facilitating meaning-making in museums, and that a docent-led gallery tour that uses questions and dialogue is an effective pedagogy that facilitates connections between visitors. Further, intergenerational docent programs build and bridge social capital that is essential to an engaged citizenry. These standpoints have shaped my interest in studying the docent program and motivated me to share successful strategies that other museums might employ to develop their own student or intergenerational docent programs. Lather (1986)
recommends a variety of “self-corrective techniques that check the credibility of data and minimize the distorting effect of personal bias upon the logic of evidence” (p. 52). These strategies include checking a priori theories with rigorous self-reflexivity, triangulation, and member checks that involve research subjects in the analysis process and in formulating valid conclusions.

Narrative Interviews

I will employ narrative interviews to develop a thick description of the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) describe qualitative interviewing as “flexible and dynamic, [and] directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words” (p. 88). Kathleen Casey (1995) refers to this form of qualitative interviewing as narrative research, as does Catherine Kohler Riessman (2002). These feminist researchers contend that such personal experiences are both political and reliable sources of subject data.

I developed an interview guide to ensure key process and summative evaluation topics were explored. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) assert that the interview guide is “not a structured schedule or protocol” and interviewers should “decide how to phrase questions and when to ask them” during the interview (p. 105). A series of open-ended questions were designed to allow subjects to “narrativize particular experiences in their lives” (Riessman, 2002, p. 219). The questions allowed docents and staff to use stories and descriptions of past events to convey their perceptions of what is important and valuable.
about the Wexner Center’s docent program. I asked other docent program practitioners to identify, in their own terms, the challenges and significance of student docent programs.

I made every attempt to make the subjects feel comfortable and safe during the interview process. Instead of structuring a rigorous question and answer session, the interviewer should “serve as a cheerful data collector; the role involves getting people to relax enough to answer the predefined questions completely” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 105). The interview process will be described in more detail in the next section.

However, interviews took place in coffee shops at times chosen by the subjects at their convenience.

Questions for interview guides were developed based on the research questions above, and on themes that emerged from reviewing the literature. Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 present the questions used during interviews with Wexner Center staff, docents, and other docent program coordinators, respectively. These guides were approved by the Institutional Review Board.
Demographic Information
- What year were you born?
- What is your gender?
- What is your ethnicity?
- What is your field of employment?
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Are you originally from Ohio?
- How long have you lived in Columbus?

Questions
- What motivated you to become a docent/participate in the docent training program?
- What were your expectations for the docent program?
- Tell me about your experience in the docent program.
- What do you find rewarding about being a docent?
- What do you find challenging about being a docent?
- Describe the role of the docent.
- What is the value of a student docent program?
- Do you volunteer anywhere besides the Wexner Center?
- Would you change the docent program in any way(s)?

Thanks! Feel free to contact me if you think of anything else you’d like to share

Figure 3.1: Interview guide for Wexner Center docents, docents-in-training, and past docents

I will collect demographic information in order to determine whether or not patterns or themes can be attributed to a specific group of individuals (e.g. men, students, or art majors). The interview questions reflect many of the major themes addressed in the literature, including motivations, rewards, and docents’ roles. I will compare the answers that docents supply to assess the alignment (or lack of) with assertions from the literature. The remaining questions regarding experience, challenges, value, and volunteer behavior will convey information specific to this case.
Figure 3.2: Interview guide for Wexner Center staff

The literature identified several areas of program administration that are important to docent program coordinators, including recruitment strategies, benefits of participation, and evaluation methods (see, for example, Blackmon, 1981, Gartenhaus, 1997, and Sweney, 2007). I included questions about program development, goals, structure, and challenges to present a full picture of the student and community docent program at the Wexner Center. I asked the staff about the role of the docent and perceived values of the docent program to address major issues in this case study. Several
questions (e.g. motivations, rewards, and the docent’s role) will allow me to cross-analyze Wexner Center docent and staff perceptions; their alignment will be used as a measure of program success.

- Please describe the structure of your docent program (when originated, size, organization).

- What are the overall mission and goals of your docent program?

- How would you describe the role of the docent? What type of pedagogy is used by docents in the galleries?

- If there is a student docent component,
  - What age group/grade are the students?
  - Why did the museum develop a student docent program? (Did you use a model?)
  - Are there different goals for the student docent program (as opposed to goals for community docents)?
  - What challenges are involved?
  - What has been rewarding?
  - What issues are important to consider when running a successful student docent program?

- If there is no student docent program,
  - Are you interested in adding a student component?
  - Why or why not?

- Do you see the development of student docent programs increasing in popularity? If so, are there implications for the museum education, and/or museum community writ large?

Thanks! Feel free to contact me if you think of anything else you’d like to share.

Figure 3.3: Interview guide for other docent program coordinators

The literature available on student and/or intergenerational docent programs, their administration, and the benefits incurred by participating students and museums is
limited. I developed questions for other docent program coordinators about goals, administration, and pedagogy to coincide with topics covered by the literature and my research questions. I will also solicit input from these coordinators about the implications and value of student and intergenerational docent programs for the museum education field because this topic was largely omitted from the literature.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using methods that aligned with the chosen research methodology. The data collected for the participant observation and autoethnography portions of the research design overlap and inform one another. These data include field notes I wrote throughout the study (in the form of my experience journal), e-mail communication with program staff and docents, and notes from in-person meetings with staff regarding specific questions about the program and its administration. The experience journal is a series of informal short essays documenting my motivations, expectations, challenges, and rewards of simultaneously being a docent-in-training and a researcher. Entries consist of motivations for taking on this project as well as reflections and critiques of training sessions, docent-related events, my first tour stop, co-tours, and the research process. I retained copies of e-mail communication with Wexner Center staff and docents throughout this process for accurate reference (personal communication, September 2007 through June 2008). E-mail topics included important dates and announcements related to the docent program as well as correspondence with interview participants. I collected documents such as training materials and readings on art and museum theory, educational handouts, notes taken during training classes, and all
required assignments. These assignments were reflective and designed to develop a
docent’s personal style and comfort in the galleries; they included six tour shadowing and
three co-tour reflections, a cumulative tour shadow reflection, an active looking exercise,
and an audience strategy paper.

I obtained contact information for interviewees from the Wexner Center education
department and from my personal interactions. A single list of contacts was compiled and
numerical identifiers were assigned to each subject as they were added; a random number
generator was used to determine the order in which they were contacted. I conducted 22
narrative interviews with 16 Wexner Center docents, four staff members (two of whom
completed the student docent training program) and two docent program coordinators at
other museums. Information was also collected via email from a previous Wexner Center
employee and a third docent program coordinator.

I sent e-mail invitations to participate in this study between February and May
2008. In order to accommodate subjects’ schedules I offered several blocks of interview
times from which the participants could select. The initial e-mail discussed the research
topic, the individual’s rights should they choose to participate, and confirmation of the
Institutional Review Board’s authorization to conduct this research (Protocol
#2008E0075). Multiple follow-up e-mails were exchanged with each subject in order to
arrange meetings. Interviews lasted between 15 and 60 minutes and took place primarily
in Cam’s Café at the Wexner Center for the Arts, as well as off-campus locations when
requested by the interviewee. I sent follow-up questions to some participants via e-mail to
clarify earlier remarks and/or pose new questions. I contacted docent program
coordinators using the same e-mail process as docents, but these interviews were conducted over the phone and via e-mail.

This research complies with The Ohio State University’s Institutional Review Board’s requirements for safe and ethical human subject research. I fulfilled training requirements for the protection of human research subjects in November 2007 by completing the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative’s tutorial and passing its six-part exam. An application for Institutional Review Board (IRB) exemption under Category #2 was initially filed January 25, 2008; exemption was approved on February 7, 2008 (Protocol #2008E0075). A second application for exemption was filed and approved in May 2008 to accommodate three changes: a new consent form for Wexner Center staff; a note that any docent program coordinators would be contacted, not just student docent program coordinators; and a revised set of questions for these docent program coordinators that evolved out of initial interview analysis (Protocol #2008E0365). A copy of each IRB Application for Exemption Approval letters can be found in Appendix C.

Research subjects for this study were all 18 years of age or older, free to withdraw at any time, assured they would not be identified either directly or through identifiers, and guaranteed that their responses would not place them in legal liability or be damaging to their finances, employment, or reputation. All docents signed a release form consenting to participate in this research, a copy of which can be found in Appendix D. I e-mailed docent program coordinators a copy of this consent form. Wexner Center staff signed a similar, but separate, consent form that approved the use of their name in this report. A copy of this consent form can be found in Appendix E.
Data Analysis

Throughout this study, I used narrative analysis (Riessman, 2002) and a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 and Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) to analyze the collected data and weight these analyses against my initial hypotheses about the value of a student docent program. Catherine Kohler Riessman’s (2002) model of narrative analysis uses an intricate system of coding and mapping lines of transcription. I did not adopt Riessman’s meticulous method of analysis, but was guided by her attention to the analyst’s potential for (mis)representing the voices of those who participated in the study. Riessman (2002) argues that because it is not possible to have direct access to another’s experience, “[w]e cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret” (p. 221). Toward this end, there are five levels of the research process where representation (or editing) occurs: attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, and reading. The following accounts Riessman’s description of each level of representation in the research process.

- I attend to and make discrete certain features in the stream of consciousness – reflecting, remembering, recollecting them into observations. (p. 222)

- Next comes the telling, the performance of a personal narrative…In the telling, there is an inevitable gap between the experience as I lived it and any communication about it. (pp. 222-223)

- Different transcription conventions lead to and support different interpretations and ideological positions, and they ultimately create different worlds. (pp. 226)

- In the end, the analyst creates a metastory about what happened by telling what the interview narratives signify, editing and reshaping what was told, and turning it into a hybrid story. (p. 226)
• Every text is ‘plurivocal, open to several readings and to several constructions’…Collaboration is inevitable because the reader is an agent of the text. (p. 227)

At each of these points in the research process I sought to be conscious of my presumptions and inside knowledge by balancing my experiences with the narratives I collected.

I chose to use a grounded theory approach with a constant comparative method of analysis when sorting data to reconcile the initial theories that guided the literature I reviewed with the research plan I developed. Glaser and Strauss (1967), who pioneered the grounded theory approach, state “no conflict between verifying and generating theory is logically necessary during the course of any given research” (p. 2). Grounded theory allows the researcher to systematically generate theories by collecting, coding, and analyzing data simultaneously. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) explain, “By continually comparing specific incidents in the data, the researcher refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationships to one another, and integrates them into a coherent theory” (p. 137). Grounded theory does not prove a specific theory or predetermined hypothesis. Instead, it draws on the collected data and allows researchers to “demonstrate plausible support for these theories” (Ibid, p. 137). Figure 3.4 summarizes and adapts Taylor and Bogdan’s version of the grounded theory approach (Ibid, p. 138). I have added the top box to acknowledge the role my a priori theories played in data collection and analysis.
I sought to engage in a process of ongoing discovery and adaptation throughout data collection and analysis, reflecting on how these findings aligned with my initial hypothesis and subsequently produced new concepts that emerged during the study. I transcribed all interviews soon after meeting with each subject, instead of waiting until all interviews had been completed. As I discovered new topics emerging from participant testimonies, I pursued them in subsequent interviews and in framing follow-up questions to earlier research participants. After each transcription was completed I e-mailed the transcripts to the research subjects to provide them the opportunity to clarify and/or correct statements, factual information, and any portions of the interview that were
inaudible. All subjects responded by approving the transcription, sending me comments and/or clarification, or sending me an edited version of the document with their comments.

Data from participant observation and journaling was coded throughout the research process and as soon as possible after subjects reviewed and approved interview data. Charlotte Aull Davies (1999) describes thematic data analysis.

The relatively formal analysis of ethnographic data nearly always begins with the consideration and development of concepts to establish and explain categories within those data and then proceeds to explore relationships between these concepts. Such concepts may then be refined, modified, extended, challenged, rejected, but it is essential that the evidence and the reasons for doing so are sought in the data and clearly specified. (p. 199)

I compare observations of participant experiences with my participation and autoethnographic reflections to confirm initial hypotheses and/or challenge new themes. I organize data from interviews, participant observation, and autoethnography by coding and re-coding, and placing it in categories that, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), fit and work with potential theories.

By “fit” we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by “work” we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and able to explain the behavior under study. (p. 3)

I also consider and interpret this data in relation to the context in which it was collected, such as solicited or unsolicited statements, my role in a setting, direct and indirect data, and who was present (Taylor & Bogdan, 1997, pp. 156-159). The use of a grounded theory and constant comparative analysis require me to look critically at each piece of data and consider its relevance to initial and new hypotheses about docent programs. This
method also allows me to compare and contrast docent perspectives with one another and with the staff’s perspectives.

The central research question of this thesis is: What is the value of a student and community docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts? To understand how participants, the Wexner Center, and the community may define the value of this case I will triangulate several sources of data, including participant observation, autoethnography, and narrative interviews. The methods I chose for data analysis, narrative and a grounded theory approach, raise two points.

First, my role as researcher cannot be separated from data I collect and analyze. Throughout the research experience I will make (sub)conscious decisions about what to include and what to omit. My dual role as researcher and participant will unavoidably influence my perceptions and interaction with participants and staff. I will address my subjectivity by engaging in self-reflective practices that challenge my a priori assumptions. This self-critical examination will help to ensure that my final analysis and conclusion are not highly subjective. Second, the attributes specific to this case study preclude my making any generalizations. However, my use of multiple data sources and comparison with trends in the literature are designed to increase the trustworthiness of my findings. I am confident the suggestions for the field and future research I propose in Chapter Six, Conclusion, will push the fields of museum education, administration, and policy forward.
CHAPTER 4

ADMINISTRATION OF A STUDENT AND COMMUNITY DOCENT PROGRAM

The Beginning: Program Goals

The Wexner Center for the Arts began a docent program in 1991, two years after the center opened. The docent population has been comprised mainly of individuals from across the Columbus community, those who largely fit the familiar docent image of older, retired, Caucasian women. University students have periodically enrolled in the program, but they were not given a special classification until 2006. In the summer of 2005, Shelly Casto was hired as Director of Education at the center, a promotion from her previous role as the center’s Educator for School and Family Programs. Casto was a student docent in the second cohort of docents at the center while earning her Masters in Art Education at The Ohio State University, and upon filling the position, began formalizing a student component of the current docent program.

I’d been a student docent myself in 1992 and 1993 when I was a graduate student here. And that was great and it was really meaningful to me…When I came back to the center as a staff member it really wasn’t happening, and I just thought that was a huge hole and it didn’t make sense in terms of even just regular visitation of our galleries by regular students. Because that really wasn’t happening either. So I made it a real priority to solve that. (Casto, 2008)
The primary goals for all of the docents at the Wexner Center are to engage the public in an open dialogue about art and act as stewards of the institution. Casto (2008) describes the goals of the docent program:

The program in general is more about the visitor. It’s about making sure that the public in general is engaged with contemporary art [and sees it] as a great opportunity for discussing contemporary issues, engaging with other people, and understanding the focus and mission and purpose of the Wexner Center.

Formalizing a student component served two additional goals: provide students an addendum to their education through practical experience, and build the Wexner Center’s student audience through deeper engagement. Casto is an experienced museum educator; prior to her time at the center, she worked at the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art in Connecticut and taught Art History at the University of Hartford. She recognizes the importance of working in galleries for anyone interested in entering the museum field.

Over my career I’ve hired a lot of people. I’ve almost never hired anyone that’s not been trained as a docent because that’s what it’s all about. The central core of what we do is teaching in the galleries. And I won’t hire someone who’s never done that. (Casto, 2008)

Given that many of the students who were likely to self-select into the training program would have an interest in the art and museum field, the course could meet these students’ needs to acquire professional experience before entering the work force.

The parallel goal to build the center’s student audience speaks to the relationship between the Wexner Center and the university. In spite of its central location on campus, the Wexner Center is distanced from its university audience. Student perceptions of why this gap exists are many and varied. An undergraduate Studio Art student enrolled in the docent program could not explain the disconnect. “I’m amazed by some people. Some of
the art majors have never been in here. Are you kidding me? The art building is only two
buildings away” (#29, 2008). But a graduate student from the Department of Art
Education pointed to a lack of understanding about the center’s purpose.

I think the Wexner Center is like a lot of resources on campus that the
students don’t necessarily use. I know from my experience teaching that
the kids don’t know what’s going on, they don’t go into the galleries. They
don’t see it as a resource that they can regularly use. (#20, 2008)

Others noted that contemporary art and the building itself are not readily accessible.

I feel like a lot of students don’t engage with the Wexner Center. They
know that it exists and they walk [by] it a lot, but I don’t think they really
go in it. I confess that I saw the movies here, but I didn’t really feel like it
was accessible to me…I think the idea of contemporary art is hard to
grasp. And then you have all these competing things in your life…My first
time I couldn’t find the entrance. (Student docent #9, 2008)

There’s something, it’s just the Wexner Center is so, everything is shiny
and stark. I don’t know, you’ve got these big open spaces and when you
walk you can hear it. It’s just not as homey…But that’s what the Wexner’s
supposed to be like. It’s supposed to be different and you’re supposed to
not feel like it’s a normal kind of space. It’s a different thing. (Student
docent #36, 2008)

Another student docent traced the distance between the two institutions back to
the politics of the center’s founding.

It’s a very fair evaluation to say that there are some things that are just sort
of grandfathered in about the relationship between the Wexner Center for
the Arts and The Ohio State University, ergo the college of the arts at
Ohio State, that are very deep rooted and very hard to break through.
(Pandora, 2008)

When the Wexner Center for the Arts was founded, it absorbed several of the university’s
visual and performing arts presenting functions that were previously under the purview of
the College of the Arts. The nuances of this complex relationship are beyond the scope of
this paper. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that the Wexner Center for the Arts is a non-academic unit within the Office of Academic Affairs; it is not a part of the College of the Arts. This schism has hindered a fluid and reciprocal relationship between the center and the College of the Arts, whose students and faculty otherwise represent a natural audience for the Wexner Center. As a result, the center has begun to recognize it must proactively build campus connections through different avenues.

The Wexner Center’s education department has been particularly active in building these bridges. Several years ago, the department hired a full time campus community outreach position that has been very successful in attracting new groups to the center. The student docent program is another way the center has engaged a new audience, through direct service and word-of-mouth. The task of filling the Wexner Center’s galleries with university student peers required reorganizing the current docent program, launching new advertising efforts, and gaining buy-in from community docents.

Getting Started: Planning and Reshaping the Docent Program

Shelly Casto spent her first year as Director of Education laying the ground work for a revised docent program. Casto (2008) stated that when the program was first proposed to leadership at the Wexner Center they responded with, “total support and enthusiasm.” As an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Art Education, Casto was able to work with a “hospitable” department and offer the course to students for academic credit (Ibid). Staffing was structured so that, aside from the Director of Education, three employees directly serve the program: a full time Education Outreach
and Development coordinator, a Graduate Assistant (GA) for Docent and Teacher Programs, and a full time Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs.

The Education Outreach and Development Coordinator, Betsy Pandora, graduated from The Ohio State University with two Bachelor of Arts degrees: Theatre and Marketing. Pandora (2008) manages the entire tour schedule for docents and the general public and describes the position:

I book the tours; I then schedule the docents for the tours. I provide the docents with information about the demographic and educational goals of each tour group. So I contribute I think to their preparation in a pretty significant way in that I have to give them a lot of info. And they like a lot of info about the people that are coming here and why they’re choosing to come here and all that. And for the student docent program I end up providing them with that same information once they get to the point of the co-tour process. (2008)

A Graduate Assistant (GA) for Docent and Teacher Programs is hired through university support and provides teaching, research, and administrative support to the program. Two students have filled this position since the student docent program was launched. The current GA describes the position:

For the docent program I do research...[for] docent binders and make sure others have that information before the exhibit comes in. I do a lot of detail type things. I get images for the tours; I get the cough drops and other basic necessities. I plan the docent events [such as] thank you events...For the student docents I do a lot of different things [such as] managing the [online] scheduling system for observing tours and then the co-tour process. (Wexner Center staff/Student docent #34, 2008)

The previous GA outlined additional duties, including, “maintaining primary communication with all docents and docents-in-training, writing a public description of program, and conducting interviews of potential candidates” (Wexner Center staff #21, 2008).
An Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs position was filled in December 2006 when Tracie McCambridge was hired. McCambridge came to the Wexner Center after working as an Education Specialist at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin. Prior to that, she interned and eventually worked freelance for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. McCambridge now manages and leads all aspects of the docent program’s administration including training, communication, and evaluation. She is also responsible for managing the center’s teacher program, which includes resource materials to prepare teachers bringing classes to the center, curriculum development, and in-service workshops.

When reintroducing the student docent component, Casto (2008) determined that the current, basic structure for training program should remain the same, “because there are just key ingredients that make sense.” However, there are now two docent categories: student and community. The student docent program is “open to all graduate and undergraduate students from any academic department from any local college or university” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008b). The community docent program is open to anyone who is not enrolled as a student. Both student and community members participate in the same training program, which is now structured to coincide with The Ohio State University’s fall and winter academic quarters.

The docent training process typically begins in August before the fall quarter starts, when all candidates must submit a resume and brief statement of intent before interviewing with education department staff. In the program’s pilot year, the education department focused on advertising the program in the College of the Arts, where they
believed interest would be highest. Betsy Pandora (2008) described the marketing process and results.

In the first year it was meant to be…a trial, get an interesting, diverse crop of students who have some real want and interest in contemporary art and would want to do it and have a relevant background in it. So it ended up being a lot of students in the first year, from actually the History of Art [department] and some from Art Education and Studio area.

Specific outreach strategies included sending letters to department heads, the Dean of the College of the Arts, and e-mailing faculty who had been involved in Wexner Center programming in the recent past. Wexner Center education staff also distributed e-mails through listservs such as the Department of Art Education’s graduate student listserv. Casto (2008) admits that the first year’s advertising, “was a little bit last minute [and] we actually started the class a bit late in the quarter, because that would enable us to really recruit people, since we did get a late start.” The efforts paid off, and resulted in a full class of 26 students.

The program was also slightly delayed in the first year because Casto recognized the importance of getting the current community docents to support the change. Here, she explains the open process:

We realized that we needed to have a series of meetings with those community docents in a safe, open way where they could feel like they had really voiced their concerns and had given us input about how to go about it. It was going to happen whether or not they wanted to. But I wanted to give them time to digest it and give us feedback. Because it is a core group who’ve been around for a long time. I knew we couldn’t do without them. I didn’t want to dispense with them; it’s just not an option. And they’re wonderful. We had a series of coffees and meetings with them as a group that were really long and involved where they really voiced their concerns. (Casto, 2008)
Support from the community docents was particularly important because the new training process included a mentoring component that meant new responsibilities for the veteran docents. I did not speak with any community docents who indicated that they were directly involved in this dialogue. However, one docent recounted being personally asked by the GA for Docent and Teacher Programs to serve as a mentor. This made the docent feel respected and appreciated, “They look at it as we’re here as volunteers so let’s make it easy for them since they’re giving us their time. We’ll work with that” (Community docent #6, 2008).

Importantly, Casto also wanted to gain buy-in because students are eligible for a tour stipend when training is complete, something not offered to community docents (Figure 1.2 in Chapter One itemizes the benefit package offered to each category of docent). Casto firmly believed that academic credit and a stipend were two crucial ingredients for engaging students. The credit would allow students to fit the training program into busy schedules and the stipend would encourage them to prioritize the activity once it wasn’t part of their school schedule. Casto recognizes it is unconventional for a docent program to offer this benefit, but is convinced it is a solid investment.

We had to create a new budget line item for paying the students but that was no problem at all. It just made a lot of sense and [has] proven to be money well spent. And I actually talk to my colleagues at other campus museums and they say, “Oh my gosh. How did you get the money to do that?” And I say they really should examine that because it is probably one of the chunks of my budget that is most well spent because it just pays back in greater returns. I don’t actually know of other university museums that do this, I’m sure there are some… I’ve been trying to encourage it because I just really think it’s worth it. (Casto, 2008)

I conducted numerous Internet searches through this research process in order to locate other (student) docent programs that offer stipends, and found only a handful (for
example, the Greenhouse Graduate Student Docent Program at the University of Washington, [http://www.biology.washington.edu/greenhouse/](http://www.biology.washington.edu/greenhouse/). While others may exist the Wexner Center’s rarity may be the result of two factors: 1) the Wexner Center for the Arts has a large endowment and effective development department that affords the center a significant amount of discretionary funds, and 2) most museums consider docents to be volunteers, not paid staff. However, Lori Elkund (2007) of the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas makes a case for hiring professionals as gallery teachers. She argues that the paid professionals require less training, are more reliable and consistent, and raise tour quality while meeting desired educational outcomes. Eklund does not discuss the relationship between paid and volunteer gallery educators.

Casto (2008) noted that, initially, the stipend component was not well received by all volunteer community docents.

It was [a bone of contention] for some, particularly for a few…For a few of them that are older and retired money is just not a factor for them in their lives. But there were a few who were younger who were maybe between jobs who we had to talk to a few times about it. On the surface it certainly can appear unfair, but at the same time there has to be a way of categorizing people…So we just had to explain [the rationale] a few times.

Casto also found it necessary to explain the new program’s goals to docents who asked, “Why are more docents needed?” She clarified that the student component was not simply a response to supply and demand for tours, it was part of a larger goal to engage the campus community. When all concerns had been addressed and the groundwork laid, the Wexner Center for the Arts was ready to launch its new student docent program. I will next discuss the Wexner Center’s progressive pedagogy and its influence on the role
all docents are expected to fulfill at the center, goals for the program, qualities the staff
looks for in potential docents, and marketing strategies.

Docent Program Pedagogy

The pedagogy that guides gallery learning at the Wexner Center is one that
emphasizes dialogue, inquiry, and experience. The education department at the Wexner
Center rejects the authoritative, lecture-style tour in favor of fostering personal
connections during participatory experiences. Both Director of Education Shelly Casto,
and Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs Tracie McCambridge, have been heavily
influenced by inquiry-based models such as Visual Thinking Strategies developed by
Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine. They also advocate and teach interpretation
strategies developed by Terry Barrett (1994 and 2008) and active looking strategies
designed by David Perkins (1994) from his work at Harvard’s Project ZERO. These
models emphasize looking closely at objects and asking questions which lead visitors to
develop their own interpretations and make connections through personal meaning-
making. This form of engagement is also intended to increase the accessibility of the art
and the museum. The literature reviewed for this study in Chapter Two indicates that the
center’s efforts are at the forefront of a shift in the debate over effective pedagogical
approaches to gallery learning that may also serve the museum’s public service role.

The inquiry-based pedagogy informs all aspects of the docent training program,
including the roles docents are expected to fulfill at the Center. According to Tracie
McCambridge, docents promote active learning and enjoyable experiences for visitors.
Their goal is to facilitate a great experience in the gallery [and] to encourage active looking, active exploration; no spoon feeding their interpretation to the visitor. It’s creating an experience. And I don’t believe in scripts for the docents, because it is a creative process for the docent as well. But the docent’s goal is to have the visitor walk away feeling like they’ve thoroughly investigated a piece and they had an experience with their fellow group members to come up with a collaborative interpretation that was driven by their own inquiry and looking at the piece of art. (2008a).

Both of the docent program’s current support staff have participated in the training program and describe the docent’s role in a similar manner. Betsy Pandora, Education Outreach and Development Coordinator stated,

If I were to play witness to what a mission would be for [the docents], I think it is to get people to have dialogues about contemporary art and contemporary issues, using the art as something that facilitates these conversations. (2008, March 19)

As this vision is adopted by staff in the education department, it creates an informal culture that informs the center’s approach to visitors, programming, and outreach efforts.

McCambridge’s view that gallery tours are creative experiences that depend upon open dialogue has inspired a second goal that runs parallel to providing great visitor experiences. She now sees two audiences for the docent program: the visitors and the docents themselves.

The longer I work with docents, the more I realize that, in my mind, it’s not just a program that creates quality experiences in galleries for students, school groups coming in. I’m really seeing it more as an adult program also. Because I’ve been seeing some of the things that some of the docents have been getting out of it…When I first started out I didn’t see it that way, because our focus is on giving really great gallery tours. But it’s really easy to forget what the docent is getting out of the experience. So while my focus is definitely on each docent creating an amazing gallery experience for our visitors, I really do think it’s important to focus on the actual docent as well. (McCambridge, 2008a)
Opinions about the docent’s role also inform what the education staff looks for in potential docents and qualities they believe make a good docent. When it comes to both student and community applicants, McCambridge looks for the same thing:

Just a very friendly person who’s not like, “I’m an expert on the history of art and I’m going to instill my knowledge on everyone.” [I look for] a person who is interested in having a conversation with the people that come in here…There’s no educational background necessary…It’s really for anyone who feels passionately about the arts and interacting with people and wanting to communicate with people. (2008a)

While the program is open to anyone passionate about the arts, the majority of participants have been arts majors. As noted earlier, this is due in part to the targeted marketing strategies in the College of the Arts during the pilot year. Marketing strategies for the student docent program in year two were intended to grow and diversify the applicant pool. Education staff again sent strategic e-mails were to academic departments and faculty members, but the center also began posting the opportunity on its website and in weekly campus-wide e-mail headlines. The center does not post flyers or send out paper mailings. The program also attracts attention from outside sources. For example, the university’s newspaper, The Lantern, featured an interview with one of the 2006-2007 student docents about the benefits of being involved at the Wexner Center (Simmons, 2008, February 2). This expanded marketing has encouraged students who are not art majors to enter the applicant pool, which McCambridge considers a welcome addition. I asked seven students how they learned about the program. Three indicated they learned about the program through word of mouth, two had received e-mails from a listserv, one found the program on the center’s website, and one could not remember.
Of note, marketing to new community docents has been extremely limited and only a few have joined the program over the past two years. Those who have joined recently come from the neighboring Columbus Museum of Art (CMA). Because McCambridge knows the Educator for School and Docent Programs and has confidence in the inquiry-based pedagogy that informs CMA training, these docents are not typically required to complete the whole training program at the center. McCambridge does conduct interviews and shadows an initial tour to ensure that docents from CMA will guide tours that foster dialogue and inquiry and are not lecture-based. Community members who are new to the docent field must fulfill the same training requirements as students.

McCambridge also cites the importance of flexibility in a good docent, something critical to engaging in an open dialogue with tour groups and navigating the Wexner Center’s exhibition schedule.

One thing that I do think makes a really good docent, is a sense of flexibility and willingness to be open to change and growing…I think an openness to new ideas is very, very important. And openness to feedback from the staff, other docents, as well as the group that’s coming in for a gallery experience. You have to be very sort of mellow. I mean you can be excited about the art, but you can’t freak out. Because being a docent is all about change. Galleries change, the people you work with every day change. Buses don’t show up, buses show up a half hour late. It’s all about being flexible…When you want to stick to your agenda too much, you realize you’re sort of taking over the experience and not letting it be a group-driven experience. (McCambridge, 2008a)

While a love of art, an interest in working with people, and flexibility are important for all docents, McCambridge thinks each person has unique motivations for participating in a docent program. She emphasizes the community docents’ interest in learning, but cites additional motivations for students.
It’s really amazing how ravenous the [community] docents are when it comes to their binders. They take in so much information. And still, they Google their own articles, they do their own research. They’re so interested in learning. I think a lot of them just love to learn. I’m sure it’s the same for the students, but they’re students, they get to learn every day. I think it might be a little different for the students. Maybe they want to better their public speaking skills, because I’ve heard that a lot from students. Maybe they just really love art…Some of the students [are artists and] very interested in how people see the work because it will inform [their own work] as an artist some day. I think each person has their own motivation for becoming a docent. (McCambridge, 2008a)

McCambridge also noted that social interaction and friendships among the participants have been a motivating factor for many of the community docents.

An inquiry-based pedagogy informs several aspects of the docent program. First, the goals that the education outlines for the program; second, the staff’s impression of the docent’s role; and third, their views of which qualities (i.e. flexibility and openness) are found in a skilled docent. Because the Wexner Center does not require a specific educational background, marketing for the program has expanded to the entire university campus. The content of the docent training program is designed to align with program goals and to teach participants inquiry-based learning strategies.

Content of the Docent Training Program

An overview of the entire docent training process was provided in Chapter One. This section considers the individual units of the training program, a structure that has remained largely unchanged since Casto developed the syllabus in 2006. McCambridge (2008a) stated that when she assumed her position during the pilot year, she “just took over the role that Shelly had paved already,” making only minor changes to the syllabus while maintaining the course’s overall direction. This section will speak to the training
program McCambridge administered in the second year of implementation, and not the pilot year, for two reasons. First, changes to overarching goals, format, and content were minimal. Second, my experience in the docent training program occurred during the 2007-2008 academic year, as did the majority of student docents I interviewed. Since we cannot speak with authority regarding the first year, or provide detailed first hand accounts, I will focus on the second year. Changes that were made between the two years will be noted when appropriate and participant evaluations of the training components will be discussed in the next chapter.

A brief reminder of the program’s format will contextualize this discussion. Individuals who are accepted through the application process begin a training course that lasts for (at least) six months. The first phase is a formal course of study during the fall quarter (September through December) and the second is a less structured co-tour mentoring process in the winter quarter (January through March). Some individuals continue the co-tour process into the spring and beyond. When both docents-in-training and the education staff feel prepared, candidates lead a solo tour that the staff observes. Docents who are successfully evaluated become “active” and may sign up to lead tours as they become available. Active docents must participate in continuing education to keep abreast of the center’s regularly rotating galleries.

*Phase One: Fall Quarter*

In September 2007, 26 university students enrolled in the Wexner Center’s docent training program during the *William Wegman: Funney/Strange*. This exhibit was a popular attraction that brought in large numbers of visitors, including more school groups
than usual. As outlined in the fall quarter syllabus (Appendix A), students are required to attend 10 weekly course sessions, one gallery learning session, and to shadow six tours. Students are also responsible for weekly reading assignments, written reflections for each tour shadow, and three additional written assignments. The final presentation is a brief “tour stop” that asks students to lead a discussion around one piece of art in the galleries.

Shelly Casto was conscious of the university students’ busy schedules, and accordingly looked to meet their time requirements. Knowing the majority of students would come from the College of the Arts, Casto offered the class when the fewest number of Art, Art Education, and History of Art courses would overlap with the docent training course. Each Friday students met for just over two hours to discuss topics such as diverse perspectives in looking at art, teaching with questions, working with adults, teens, and children, object safety, and developing an overarching theme for the tour. Guest lecturers included a public speaking coach from the university’s theatre department, a professor from the art education department who spoke about appreciating diverse audiences, and the Director of Security at the Wexner Center. Students also spent one class exploring the Wexner Center’s architecture. Class sessions typically began with discussions in the center’s film and video auditorium and were followed by time in the galleries to practice strategies discussed in class, such as tour introductions and developing questions for specific age groups. For each new installation students attend at least one gallery learning session to learn about the incoming works and artists.

Readings that address concepts central to the leading discussion-based tours, working with diverse groups, and understanding the Wexner Center’s institutional history are an invaluable resource in the docent curriculum. The core reading list for the docent
program was essentially the same for the first and second years of the course (a list of readings can be found in the fall 2007 syllabus located in Appendix A). I will note student opinions regarding the usefulness of these materials in Chapter Five. The education department also has a small library of materials that are available, from which docents may borrow.

I was not aware of this resource until conducting interviews in the spring and think it would be beneficial for staff to include information about this resource on the syllabus for students seeking additional reading materials.

Training consists of six shadow tour experiences where students observe docents leading gallery tours. In the first year, the Graduate Assistant for Docent and Teacher Programs (GA) e-mailed the class a tour schedule and students responded with their preferences. The staff worked to accommodate as many requests as possible, which is a difficult task. The education department now uses The Ohio State University’s Carmen website to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. Carmen is an online forum where educators can post content and encourage student participation with a discussion board feature. The GA now posts a current schedule with available time slots and students post requests for certain slots. Students reference the discussion board until the GA posts an updated schedule. None of the students with whom I spoke reported technical difficulties using the website but their experiences with the co-tour process will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The Graduate Assistant in charge of the Carmen site this year was not familiar with the previous years’ system, but stated, “I love it for the student class. I think it’s worked out well for the discussion board” (Wexner Center staff/Student docent #34, 2008). Staff encourages students to observe an array of tour groups, including students in
elementary, middle, and high school, college students, and adults. Docents write reflections after each shadowed tour, which include the students’ thoughts on what worked well, what they would have done differently, and what they learned. At the end of the quarter a culminating tour shadow experience paper allows docents to reflect on the quarter overall and to describe what they learned from observing active docents.

The docent training program requires two additional writing assignments. These exercises are designed to align with the program’s pedagogical goals by prompting students to practice their skills in leading discussion-based tours with a variety of visitors. An “active-looking” exercise challenges students to sit with a work of art with which they are unfamiliar for an extended period of time and examine it closely. The format for these looking logs is adapted from David Perkins’ (1994) “The Intelligent Eye.” The course syllabus describes the exercise’s purpose: “These logs take you step by step through the looking process that you will eventually lead groups through” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2007a, p. 8).

I selected a piece from the Milton Caniff exhibition on display at Hopkins Hall, which houses several departments within the College of the Arts. Completing this exercise took approximately 30 minutes, far longer than I had spent with a single work of art since my undergraduate art history courses. I was surprised by the number of details I uncovered that I would not have noticed when spending only a few moments in front of the piece during a typical museum visit. This was an extremely useful exercise that furthered my understanding of how tour groups might follow the same process.

An audience strategy assignment asks docents-in-training to plan an hour long tour for an age group of their preference. The tour plan must include an introduction, selection of art works, questions to make the tour interactive, over arching themes, and a conclusion. This exercise enabled me to conceptualize a full tour from start to finish.
However, there is a slight disconnect between this planning process and actually leading an interactive tour. Program administrators constantly remind docents-in-training that anything can happen in the galleries and that the key to a successful tour is flexibility. Full tour outlines may potentially serve as a “script,” which Tracie McCambridge dislikes, and may hinder a docent’s ability to adapt to unforeseen events and each tour group’s individual interests. When used as a basic planning guide, and not as a script, a written exercise such as this is useful for novice docents.

During the last week of training, docents make a final presentation, which indicates the extent of what students have learned about teaching in the galleries. Students are given seven minutes to conduct a “tour stop” that focuses on one piece of artwork displayed in the galleries. The presentation should be interactive with a specific audience in mind. As the audience, classmates are asked to “act” that age during the tour stop. Students are given evaluation criteria ahead of time, and include the use of questions, communication skills, age appropriate vocabulary, and tools and tips discussed throughout the quarter.

**Phase Two: Winter Quarter (and Beyond)**

University students enroll for a two unit, pass/fail course, during the winter quarter. Winter quarter training consists of attendance at professional development gallery sessions, three partnered co-tours with mentor docents, and a written reflection for each co-tour. After docents conduct at least three co-tours, and parties feel prepared, Wexner Center staff observes a solo tour. See Appendix F for a copy of the Winter 2008 syllabus. Docents-in-training are not required to complete their co-tours and solo tour
within the winter quarter’s 10-week time frame. Tracie McCambridge encourages individuals to co-tour and shadow tours as many times as they need to in order to feel comfortable leading a group through the galleries on their own. Depending on the number of tours available and individual schedules, there may not be enough time to complete this process during the quarter.

At this stage in the training process students use the same resources as active docents to prepare for (co-)touring: reading materials and gallery learning sessions. The Graduate Assistant for Docent and Teacher Programs assembles a binder of information for each new exhibition which includes a list of the art, press releases from the Wexner Center, scholarly material written on the artist(s), and, when possible, the work itself. Part of the Wexner Center for the Arts’ mission is to act as a “laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008a). Unlike museums with permanent collections, some of the center’s exhibitions present entirely new works by artists and artists in residence, and literature has not yet been written. Thus, while binders offer a great deal of background information about the artist and their past work, there is often little material about the work displayed at the Wexner Center. A quarterly calendar of docent learning sessions supplements and enriches opportunities for docents to learn about the current exhibit (see Appendix B for a copy of the Winter 2008 Docent Calendar). The calendar includes gallery learning and brainstorming sessions specifically for docents as well as public lectures and artist talks. Program staff also creates transcripts from artist gallery talks which docents can reference if they are unable to attend the talk.
The major component to this stage of the training process is the partnered co-tour, which enables docents-in-training to practice and refine gallery teaching skills. Docents-in-training must complete at least three co-tours with active docents, who are also known as “mentor docents.” Once a docent-in-training has scheduled a co-tour via the Carmen discussion board, it is their responsibility to contact the mentor docent one week in advance. The team then works together to determine how they will structure the tour. Both active docents and docents-in-training are required to arrive at the Wexner Center approximately 30 minutes before the tour is scheduled to begin for last minute preparation and questions. After the tour, program staff asks the team to discuss successful aspects of the tour, and the elements needing further practice. During the program’s pilot year, staff discovered that responsibilities for communication between docents and docents-in-training needed to be clarified. Shelly Casto (2008) explained,

We had trouble making sure, for instance, that the students consulted with the community docents in advance of the tour so they knew what was supposed to happen, what stop they were doing, and to make sure student docents [knew] it was their responsibility to approach the community docent. There was just confusion about that so we had to make it a clear responsibility for someone. And also make it really clear to both parties that they were to arrive at a certain time so they would have an additional minute to touch base before the tour. That was really important.

None of the students I spoke with from the second year indicated this communication was a problem. In my experience, the staff made explicit in several e-mails that it was the student’s responsibility to contact mentor docents. The personal interaction between docents-in-training and mentor docents will be explored in the next chapter.

Similar to the shadow tour reflections, docents-in-training must write reflections for each co-tour. The syllabus asks students to consider what went well, what might be
done differently, and what was surprising. The students with whom I spoke did not comment on the usefulness of these reflections.

I found that the reflection was more or less useful depending on the amount of time I spent with a mentor docent after the co-tour. If we spoke at some length about these questions, the reflection was more of a duplication of thought. However, when the mentor docent and I only briefly discussed how the tour went, the writing exercise helped to formalize my thoughts about these issues.

Mentor docents are also asked to complete reflections for the co-tour that are shared with docents-in-training before their first solo tour. Tracie McCambridge indicated several mentor docents do not follow through with this, particularly when the co-tour goes well, and instead verbally communicate their thoughts.

Evaluating the Docent Program

The Wexner Center’s docent program involves a combination of formal and informal methods for evaluating the training course, docent tours, and the program as a whole. Formal evaluations of the training course are completed using standard university course evaluation forms. In addition to a narrative course evaluation from the Department of Art Education at the end of the fall quarter, students are asked to fill out an online evaluation of instruction form through the University Registrar’s office after the fall and winter quarters. Shelly Casto determined that the two university forms yield sufficient input, making any additional forms redundant. Casto also indicated that students from the pilot year provided constructive comments that informed program changes, and she anticipates similar results each year.
The Wexner Center does not have a formal evaluation process for active docents. The omission of this process, as well as an opportunity for docents to evaluate the staff, runs contrary to suggestions from the volunteer and docent literature. Sweney (2007) and Gartenhaus (1997) have recommended formal evaluations as a means for personal and professional development that give docents an opportunity to receive personal attention from the staff. Tracie McCambridge notes that she considered implementing a process for evaluating docents on a regular basis when she was hired, but no longer sees this need. Instead, the relatively small size of the docent program allows her to give active docents ongoing, personal attention that addresses their performance.

McCambridge does note a variety of other evaluation methods that informs her awareness of each docent’s tour style, including docent-in-training reflections, teacher evaluations, and her own observations.

One of the things I’ve found really, really beneficial is the student docent program. The students very much know what I expect the tour to look like. So the reflection forms I get back from the students are really, really helpful… Even if the students don’t realize that [by] writing a certain thing about the tour – especially early on when they don’t quite know each docent’s style, they don’t know the personality – it can be very telling what’s going on during a certain docent’s tour. (McCambridge, 2008a)

In alignment with the literature, the Wexner Center staff informs active docents that the docents-in-training will submit written reflections to the staff (see Gartenhaus, 1997). McCambridge (2008b) explains:
It was a completely open process. Community docents were aware that students created reflections based on their tour observations and they knew that I would see the reflections. Docents expressed interest in reading their tour reflections and, if students were comfortable, we distributed all reflections that I thought were constructive. A few of the reflections were a bit harsh and touched on the docent’s personal style rather than the success of the tour. I didn’t distribute those reflections, as they really couldn’t serve a constructive purpose and could actually deteriorate the relationship between the student docents and the community docents, and really, the confidence of the docent. Most all of the students asked that we cover their names before releasing their reflections, which we did.

The education department also asks teachers who bring school groups to fill out an evaluation after their visit (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2007b). Questions include:

- Did you and your students feel welcome?
- Did the tour meet the needs and expectations of your group?
- Do you feel like your docent was well prepared and knowledgeable about the topics that were discussed during your tour?
- Do you feel like this tour was appropriate for the age or ability level of your group?
- Do you feel like your group was engaged and encouraged to actively look at and discuss the art or architecture?

These evaluations align with the program’s goals to provide discussion-based tours that engage visitors. Sweney (2007) notes the importance of aligning evaluation tools with program goals and outcomes. While I did not review teacher evaluations, Betsy Pandora (2008) observed that comments are mixed, but generally positive.

Most of it I would have to say is positive. “We enjoyed it. It was fun. It was interesting.” There are teachers and people who really feel the need to go above and beyond and compliment our docents on how informed they are about the variety of things that are housed here. But you know other people do have criticisms and sometimes it’s more along the lines of, “Oh, my docent was too quiet; Oh, my docent talked too much; Oh, I wish we would have had…” Probably the number one criticism I think we get is just, “I wish we had more time to wander around or look at the art.” But when you sign up to go on a docent-led tour, it’s a led tour, so it’s meant to be a different gallery experience.
Other teachers question the presence of docents-in-training who shadow tours when the education department has not communicated the reason for their presence, or they are not introduced. Staff indicated that they are aware of this concern and attempt to convey the presence of the docents-in-training when possible. McCambridge notes that she is receptive to feedback from teachers; if she receives questionable feedback, she will “hop on” one of that docent’s next tours to make her own determination of their performance.

Importantly, the Wexner Center’s education department has worked to cultivate an environment in which docents and docents-in-training feel comfortable approaching the staff with any issues and/or concerns. The individuals I interviewed spoke highly of this informal process and felt comfortable approaching the staff at any time. One community docent stated, “I feel like I could go to them if I did have a complaint” (#30, 2008, February 29). The staff also holds occasional “check point” sessions where docents can not only discuss the current exhibit but they can also relay any pending concerns. For example, in May 2008 McCambridge invited docents-in-training from the fall 2007 class to meet for pizza and discuss what went well and what could be improved as she prepared the next year’s syllabus. Eleven students, including myself, attended the meeting.

We shared stories about our co-tours and discussed helpful strategies for the current exhibit. Hearing from other docents-in-training about their tour experiences was a valuable experience for me, the other students, and the staff. It was nice to reconnect with several of the students I had not seen since the fall quarter ended.

McCambridge followed up on this open forum by sending meeting minutes to those who attended and encouraging us to send additional comments or suggestions.

Until this study, no formal visitor studies or evaluations have been conducted to determine the program’s alignment with its stated goals. Rather, the Wexner Center for
the Arts docent program uses a combination of formal and informal evaluation methods to engage in a constant self-assessment and improvement process. The relatively small size of the program allows staff members to form personal relationships with each docent, enabling the staff to rely primarily on informal evaluation methods to keep abreast of the docents’ touring styles. Staff members seek to foster a culture of flexibility and responsiveness that encourages docents to share concerns and challenges as they arise, then use suggestions to actively plan for the program’s future.

Planning for the Future

An ongoing (in)formal evaluation process allows staff for the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts to be responsive to docent needs, adapt to challenges, and develop new goals that compliment the program’s overall mission. The staff has identified two related program goals for the next year: 1) increase the diversity of the docent corps, and 2) increase the prestige and attractiveness of the program to the student body.

Incorporating university students increased the age and gender diversity of the docent corps, and expanded advertising efforts in the second year draw students majoring in subjects other than the arts. However, the docent program stands to improve in cultural and linguistic diversities. The staff wants to increase this diversity in order to serve the vast array of international students on campus and in the Columbus community. Shelly Casto (2008) remarked, “We have so many international students…wouldn’t it be great for all of those international student groups to constantly call us and ask, can you give a tour of the galleries in this language? Tracie McCambridge sees a diverse corps of
docents that reflects the community as one way to break down misconceptions about the
Wexner Center and elitism.

My main goal is to be able to bring in people who can use sign language
and Spanish speakers...[I’d like to] bring in a wide range of people so that
they can relate to all audiences. It’s sort of fighting the whole, “The
Wexner Center is an elitist place.” All art institutions have that glare
around them from the public; they think they’re not for them. So I really
want to create a group of docents that can help to make people realize,
“Hey, it’s not just people who all look and think the same. It’s a diverse
group of people.” (McCambridge, 2008a)

McCambridge is working to develop personal connections throughout the university and
has asked the Wexner Center’s marketing department to circulate advertisements to
international departments. I have encountered these notices on the ¿Que Pasa, OSU?
Calendar of Events website (http://quepasa.osu.edu/calendar.html#docent) and on The
Ohio State University’s gay and lesbian community listserv, Out & About @ OSU
(personal communication, May 2008).

Shelly Casto (2008) indicated that a parallel goal for the program in the next one
to two years is to increase the prestige of the student docent program. Casto states,

I want it to be increasingly sought after and competitive among the student
body so that we are creating a real sense that this is a big deal to get to do
this. That translates into, “The Wexner Center is an important component
of our education here at the university.” It’s sort of about going straight to
the students and creating a sense that, “We probably really should tune
into [the Wexner Center] because there’s stuff going on there.”

The expanded marketing campaign and word-of-mouth of the each cohort of new
students will contribute to the number of interested applicants and heighten the awareness
of the Wexner Center’s profile on campus. However, increased competition and prestige
runs counter to efforts aimed at breaking down preconceptions of elitism. Staff will need
to consider if an increased sense of competition will effectively translate into student perceptions that the Wexner Center is an important component of their education.

Of note, the education department does not consider retention of student docents to be a major concern. Of the 26 students who enrolled in the training program during the pilot year, only 5 have remained on as active docents. As of May 2008, 9 of the original 26 students who enrolled in the fall of 2007 are continuing their training and 6 have become active docents. While this suggests a higher retention rate, participation in spring of the pilot year was similar and decreased over time. Shelly Casto explained that between scheduling conflicts and graduation, she anticipates student retention rates will be low for the program. Several students confirmed these expectations, adding that the acquisition of full-time jobs is an obstacle in their continuing on as active docents. However, most indicated they would like to continue with the program when possible. While the department would like to see more students remain active, and offers the stipend as an incentive, they understand that this is not always possible. The Wexner Center is committed to administering the student docent program, regardless, and will rely on community docents for ongoing participation. Casto also affirmed that one of the program’s goals is to provide a practical educational experience for students. Even with a high attrition rate, the program still accomplishes this goal. Additionally, a new cohort of students each fall will serve to continuously revitalize the program and bring fresh perspectives into the galleries.
Discussion

This chapter has discussed the administration of the Wexner Center for the Arts’ docent program. This account was informed by interviews with staff and docents as well as my own participation in the training program. The program’s initial goals prompted the reorganization of the program’s administrative structure and contextualized the importance of involving community docents. A discussion-based pedagogy infuses all aspects of the Wexner Center’s docent program, including the docent’s role, marketing strategies, and the content of the training course. Informal and flexible evaluation processes allow the staff to respond to participant concerns and engage in an ongoing planning process. Using the structure and administration of the Wexner Center for the Arts docent program as a framework, the next chapter will look closely at the experiences of the students and community members involved.
CHAPTER 5

THE DOCENT’S EXPERIENCE

The previous chapter explored administrative components of the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts, drawing on the staff’s knowledge as well as my own research and participation in the training program. This chapter continues to explore the docent program through the lived experiences of docents and docents-in-training. The alignment between motivations and rewards cited in the literature and those expressed by docents at the Wexner Center are considered. Students provide an evaluation of the training process, reflecting on the usefulness of the structure and content, challenges associated with scheduling, and the process of working with mentors. Docent perceptions of their roles in the galleries are compared with staff expectations. Finally, participants describe their perceptions of how the docent program effectively builds bridges to the university. This compilation of docent experiences differs from previously published descriptions of a docent programs because it synthesizes the views of a single docent corps (see Choi, 1998 and Johnson, 1998). The literature provides practitioner perceptions of participant experiences or individual reports from docents on topics such as motivation and rewards, but does not give voice to multiple participants in the same program.
The Wexner Center for the Arts docent program is relatively small. As of spring 2008 the program consists of 44 persons actively giving tours or in training: 24 community members and 20 university students. Figure 5.1 tracks the total number of active and training student and community docents over the past two years.

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Figure 5.1: Number of community and student docents, fall 2006 through spring 2008

I conducted interviews with 16 of the 44 Wexner Center docents and docents-in-training, representing 36 percent of the total docent corps. These included five active community docents, two students from the 2006-2007 class (one active and one inactive), and nine students from the 2007-2008 class at various points in their training. Additional insights from student and community docents not interviewed were gathered from the Wexner Center blog (2008c), an article in the university’s newspaper (Simmons, 2008, February 2), and statements posted by docents on a bulletin board in the Wexner Center’s education offices.

The docents I interviewed come from a variety of backgrounds. I spoke with four men and 12 women; fourteen of the docents were Caucasian, one was Asian, and one
considered them self “other.” Three of these individuals were born between 1943 and 1960, the Baby Boomers era; four were born between 1961 and 1981, members of Generation X; seven were born between 1982 and 1988, members of the Millenial generation; and two declined to provide this information. Seven individuals were originally from Ohio and the remaining nine moved to the Columbus area at various points in time over the past several decades.

University students represented arts and non-art majors. Three students are in doctoral programs, two are in Master’s programs, and six are undergraduates (including four Bachelor of Arts, one Bachelor of Fine Arts, and one Bachelor of Science). Several of the community docents were retired and came from medical, law, and political fields; one still works in an arts-related industry and one declined to comment. Accordingly, the educational backgrounds ranged from some college to multiple advanced degrees.

Finally, docents reported a range of experiences with docent tours prior to their enrollment in the program. Several students had never taken a tour, one reported not knowing what a docent was, and still another indicated they don’t enjoy taking docent tours when going to other museums. In contrast, four of the community docents are self-proclaimed “double docents” and volunteer at another local museum and one of the students had previously led tours at another museum.

Students who enrolled for the training program had mixed expectations. Four of the students stated they had no expectations for the program. One student had read about the program on the website and felt prepared for what was involved. Another had spoken with someone who had participated in the first year expected to have fun and meet a lot of people. Two students with very different backgrounds commented on their
expectations for course content and the role of the docent: the student with no
background in museum education anticipated learning how to give tours where the
docents did most of the talking; the student with experience in the museum education
field anticipated learning about educational theory and spending time in the galleries for
discussion and practice. None of the docents I spoke with reported wanting more
information or feeling unprepared prior to the start of the course.

Motivations

The topic of motivation is frequently addressed in the literature, often in relation
to strategies for recruitment. Docent and practitioners suggests one of the primary reasons
individuals serve as docents is an interest in lifelong learning. Specifically, docents are
individuals interested in the subject matter and the ongoing educational opportunities the
position affords. Motivations noted in the broader field of volunteerism are also widely
acknowledged to apply to the docent field. This list is by no means exhaustive but
includes the desire to make a difference in the organization and community, a way to
make friends, and learn new skills.

I asked all the docents and docents-in-training what motivated them to participate
in the docent training program to determine if there is something unique about the
center’s program that inspires involvement. In alignment with the literature, both student
and community members cited an interest in learning more about art as their reason for
going involved in the program. A retired community docent wanted “to be intellectually
challenged and able to share with others my knowledge and enthusiasm” (#16, 2008,
February 15). Several participants emphasized they were particularly interested in
learning more about contemporary art. The Wexner Center was seen as a reliable source for this information: “I wanted to learn a lot more about contemporary art and I feel like I learn best from direct experience. I knew the best way to learn about it was to get involved here at the Wexner” (Student docent #11, 2008).

An interest in the organization and meeting new people are two motivations frequently cited in the literature, and echoed by participants at the Wexner Center. A student docent from the first year of the program stated, “I started it just as a way to get involved with the Wexner Center and meet some of the people over there” (#20, 2008). A community docent described visiting the Wexner Center frequently with their spouse since it opened and felt his or her involvement was “natural” and a way to meet interesting people (#30, 2008).

Both community and student docents see the opportunity as a means for personal fulfillment and development. Some docents saw it as a way to share the knowledge they already had about art. In an interview posted on the WexBlog, a student docent stated, “When I started, I simply wanted to express my ideas about contemporary art” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008c). One community docent described the program as an outlet for their education.

It was something to do; it was a way for me to use my education [in art history]. In my job I’m not using it. It was an outlet for me to use that knowledge and also give my knowledge back. Give the community knowledge. (#6, 2008)

Another community docent viewed the opportunity as a way to volunteer and give back while exploring their own passion.
I have done other volunteer stuff. I’ve worked for school levies...When I decided to do this I wanted it to be something I have a passion for. Because you don’t get paid and I was used to getting paid very well. So I knew I had to do something that I love. It’s almost as if, well if you volunteer you must be making a sacrifice. And I think that’s sort of a stupid approach. And it’s like, no. Everybody has a passion for something that they’re willing to do and not get paid. You just have to figure out what it is. (#2, 2008)

Students preparing to enter the workforce see the program as a great opportunity for professional development and resume building. Several students wanted to learn more about various aspects of arts administration and museum education.

Once I decided arts administration was something I really wanted to pursue I thought this would be a really good way to get some experience with that side of it since I can’t take a million classes in a visual arts setting. I just thought it would be fun to see how the whole education department functions. (Student docent #14, 2008)

I did an internship at [a museum] and I decided that maybe I wanted to...be a museum educator. And one of the things that museum educators do, especially if you go in with a PhD is you end up training docents. So I thought, “Ok, you can’t really train a docent unless you’ve been a docent.” (Student docent #27, 2008)

Another student indicated they were motivated to enroll in the program in order to develop presentation and people skills.

It kind of intimidated me that we have to talk on our feet and answer questions quickly. I’m not good with that. I’m not good with immediately responding so I figured this would be a good way [to learn] because I would get the training and maybe practice in order to be more flexible in dealing with the public. (Student docent #28, 2008)

Of note, several community docents, including some I did not interview, serve as “double docents” at the Wexner Center and the Columbus Museum of Art in downtown Columbus. Several years ago the Wexner Center hosted a very popular Julie Taymor
exhibition, and the demand for tours exceeded the center’s capacity. The education department solicited docents at the Columbus Museum of Art to assist with tours, many responded and some have stayed on to volunteer at both institutions.

The motivations cited above suggest that docents at the Wexner Center for the Arts are consistent with the literature. Wexner Center docents are motivated by opportunities for lifelong learning, interest in the subject matter, and personal development. They also want to get involved with the organization and meet new people. The literature noted that many volunteers seek to gain new skills for future employment and the students I spoke with indicated that gaining practical, professional experience was a major motivating factor for their enrollment in the program. Students seek to complement a traditionally theoretical university education with experience they can highlight in the job market. It is likely that many university students will participate in docent programs for this reason and museums seeking to recruit students should be cognizant of this important motivating factor.

On Training

Building on the detailed discussion of administration, format and content of the docent training program in Chapter Four, this section considers the participant’s perspective of docent training at the Wexner Center. The 2007-2008 docent training cohort was comprised only of university students; community docent insight is used to balance perspectives. Rather than begin interviews with questions about specific training program components, I asked each student to discuss their experience with the training program, and emphasized that the question was intended to be broad. This let students
determine for themselves what was important and relevant. After interview subjects thoroughly discussed those issues they valued, which varied widely, I asked them to comment on challenging or problematic components of the training program raised by other subjects. There was both consensus and debate around nearly every component of the training. Importantly, many of the students reported that the training was a good experience.

Fall Quarter: Allotment of Time

The fall quarter 2007 docent training class was held Friday mornings from 9:30 to 11:48 AM. The Wexner Center education department scheduled the course at that time to avoid as many conflicts with other College of the Arts courses as possible. Only one student I spoke with noted an initial course conflict that was eventually resolved. That same student found having class only one day a week was both enjoyable and allowed time to prepare during the week. A student who is also a Wexner Center staff member advocated for class sessions more than once per week.

This is just my opinion, and maybe it’s just my learning style, but I think it would maybe benefit the students in the course to, instead of having it be this massive chunk of time once a week on Friday, break it into two days. I think giving people more time to be here other than once a week gives them a better sense of what we’re doing, what the tour process is overall. It’s really hard and…it’s really easy to forget what you’re doing. (Pandora, 2008)

A second student also felt the class meeting time should be extended, but did not indicate a preference for longer class periods or meeting an additional day each week.

I still feel like there wasn’t enough time in the program itself. And I’m really not one to say it should have been longer. Most of our classes can drag sometimes, but I feel like it would have benefited from some extra time. (Student docent #10, 2008)
Other student docents either had no comment on the time of the class or indicated they were satisfied with the schedule.

*Fall Quarter: Structure*

Fall quarter classes generally followed the same basic structure: a lecture and discussion in the Film/Video Theater followed by time in the galleries to practice different tour components or strategies related to the day’s topic. Tracie McCambridge led the first half of class in much the same way she does a gallery tour, heavily based on questions and discussion amongst the group. The use of and division of this time was contested by the students. One of the students was frustrated by the style and wanted to hear more definitive answers.

Sometimes I felt like there needed to be a point when the questioning stopped, in terms of our teachers. There were some times when I felt like half the answers were further questions. A voice of authority needed to be spoken. I appreciated that Tracie was trying to exemplify an, “ask good questions mentality.” But I felt like sometimes people were asking her a question and she was asking a question back. Yeah, works for Socrates, but I don’t know if it worked every time here…So yeah, there were occasions when I thought that would have been helpful if we had had some “role modeling.” (Student docent #27, 2008)

This style of teaching conforms to the program’s overall pedagogical goals and emphasizes the idea that there is rarely one “right” answer, especially in the arts and in teaching. However, when factual information such as an artist’s birth date is in question, docents are expected to provide the answer. If they do not know the answer, or are uncertain, Wexner Center staff tells docents to acknowledge they do not know rather than provide incorrect information.
Despite his or her initial hesitation, the same student docent acknowledged that McCambridge’s teaching method was beneficial and good preparation for gallery tours.

After awhile I started to really appreciate [the way we discussed things]. One of the things that happened, and I think that Tracie was really good at, was bringing out different viewpoints and waiting for those viewpoints to emerge rather than just trying to give a bunch of information herself. So after I got used to that I started really appreciating what she was doing. She really practices what she preaches. She conducted her class in the same way she thinks we should give a tour. And I really appreciated being able to see that in action. (#27, 2008)

This student also suggested ending the discussion portion of the class earlier to spend more time in the galleries. Practicing in the galleries was seen as a better way to understand how to lead tours and facilitate group discussions, a skill that both staff and experienced docents repeatedly remark is something best learned by doing.

I think we just needed time to practice what we learned. I thought the group activities would have been really cool if we’d had time to actually do them...Maybe even if she’d given us our group activity [one week] then we [presented] it the next week so that we actually had time to put some real thought and energy into it, then we could get something out of it, hear what other people had done. All the activities seemed like good activities but I just don’t think we had time to do them. (#27, 2008)

Many sessions ran over the allotted time, and individuals or groups often could not complete their presentations. On some occasions these groups were asked to present the following week; no docents commented on how this affected their training.

Other students noted enjoying the discussion format prior to time in the galleries. One graduate student stated, “I like conversations with people in the class because you don’t really get to have those conversations so much elsewhere, in [the History of Art] department especially” (#28, 2008). This quote alludes to the difference between a discussion-based pedagogy and the authoritative voice in scholarly art history literature.
that is conveyed in traditional, lecture-style gallery tours still offered by many docents and museums.

Training Content and Pedagogy

Participants commented on the range of topics covered, readings, assignments, and guest lecturer series. While these components were generally found to be useful and interesting, several students noted they did not feel fully prepared to actually facilitate a discussion and recommended ways to learn this skill earlier.

Students indicated they felt the range of topics covered within the course helped them to better understand the docent’s role and prepared them for touring with different demographic groups. One remarked, “I think the information was really helpful. I think they did all they could. I think it’s structured really well. We concentrated on a lot of different aspects” (Student docent #14, 2008). Another found it helpful to discuss working with different age groups and how to start a conversation about a piece of art. One of the students in the pilot year of the program was unsure how similar the second year was to their training. Nevertheless, they asserted the usefulness of the range of topics.

I don’t know if they’re doing the same now. The first quarter we…talked a lot about interpreting art. Like the book that Terry Barrett wrote. Interacting with different visitors in the galleries, how to handle conversations, starting discussions, things like that...Not only that, but also talking about art in other ways than art historical concerns. I found it useful. (Student docent #20, 2008)

This description could easily apply to the second year, affirming that the training program’s pedagogy has not changed.
Several students commented that the assignments and readings were interesting and of high quality. A History of Art student noted the tour reflection assignments were helpful and encouraged him or her to use different thinking skills.

It was kind of a nice relief to do those reflections and short papers. In comparison to my other work [it] took a different type of thought process. So I enjoyed it. That was fun. It wasn’t much of a challenge. (Student docent #28, 2008)

This same student enjoyed the exposure to practitioner-oriented readings.

I really liked all the articles we read because I don’t read that type of stuff in art history at all. You don’t see any of the practical things and surveys of visitors. And I really like surveys, I like seeing what they say. And I never get to see that in any of the work I do. So that was a lot of fun to read. (Student docent #28, 2008)

A graduate student in Art Education had read several of the articles before and described them as “some of my favorites” (#10, 2008). Another student requested a list of additional, optional readings on museum education theory. Only one student stated they had not read all of the materials, but qualified, “I don’t feel any less prepared for not reading everything” (#36, 2008). No one else indicated they did not feel a need to complete all of the fall reading materials.

A popular content component of the training program was the guest lecturer series. A professor from the Department of Theatre provided a public speaking refresher, a professor from Department of Art Education spoke about working with diverse audiences; and the Director of Security at the Wexner Center spoke about object and gallery safety. Several people commented positively on the speakers as a whole, and two were very impressed with the professor from the Department of Theatre who gave a public speaking refresher the first week.
I loved the…speakers. I thought that the most valuable speaker was the one from the theatre department. She was amazing. To refer to docenting in a theatrical way, because you’re a performer, was very helpful to me…It would have been nice to have her come back at some point. (Student docent #10, 2008)

I do remember, in the beginning of the quarter, when we did that thing with the theatre coach; that was awesome. I thought that was so helpful, and it was such a great introduction to the class…I really expected that whole thing to be very uncomfortable…But she was great and the [part about] how together you are, and that the person you will be speaking to will probably mimic what you are doing. I never would have thought about that before. I just felt, wow, that was so eye-opening to me…It might have been nice if there were more things like that. (Student docent #36, 2008)

Students recommended bringing guest speakers back during next year’s class.

Few docents directly discussed what they learned as a result of the training program. This was mainly discussed in terms of the docent’s role, which will be explored in the next section. However, student noted, “I think the docent program in itself did a really good job preparing [me to lead tours]” (#36, 2008). Another student felt the course added to the ways they approach art.

What I liked about it was that it gave me different avenues into art and different avenues into talking about art. That was one reason I got into art education, to break away from the boundaries of art history, approach it many ways instead of one direct way. (Student docent #20, 2008)

Conversely, several participants pointed to a common concern, finishing the fall quarter without fully understanding how to lead a good, coherent, discussion-based tour. Some docents, including myself, found it difficult to apply strategies to new exhibits when all our previous practice had focused on a different type of art and artist.
It’s hard to really get at [an overall theme] I think unless you’ve done it before with these particular works. We focused so much on Wegman’s content that it didn’t translate that well over into a different exhibit…. some of those skills definitely weren’t translatable to other works of art. (Student docent #28, 2008)

This aspect of the program’s pedagogy and training is challenging exactly because, unlike many lectures, no two group discussions are the same. An individual who is just learning how to lead good discussions will have difficulty using new, unfamiliar tools in different contexts. This is exactly what happens every three to four months when exhibitions change at the Wexner Center. One student expressed disappointment at not having gained a clear idea for how to facilitate discussions.

I do think that’s what the course was supposed to be about, and it sort of didn’t happen in a linear way. I never emerged with a list of this is how you do a tour; this is how you conduct a good discussion. So I think maybe some readings that were a little bit more pointed towards exactly that [would be good]. (Student docent #27, 2008)

Several of the students who felt frustrated at the end of fall quarter have since graduated to “active” docent status. Indeed, practicing in the galleries and actually leading tours appears to be an effective way to develop the skills necessary to lead a discussion with diverse groups.

Students who felt unprepared to lead tours suggested changes to the fall quarter syllabus they perceived would remedy this concern. The final assignment for the course was a presentation on a single work, a “tour stop.” Most students felt this was helpful but should have been done earlier in the quarter. This experience would increase their preparation as they developed strategies for leading discussion-based tours.
Instead of doing one stop on our tour as the final project, maybe we could have done a full tour with half the group and each done one of our own...It’s a different experience to structure a whole tour as opposed to one stop on a tour...We could have done one stop earlier, in my opinion....I think that would have helped ease us in a little to doing tours. (Student docent #28, 2008)

In the end, when we actually gave our mini fake tours, that was really helpful. And we should have been doing that for maybe half the class...That was the first time I really understood the concept of...questioning. And before that we learned a lot of theory and stuff, not that that’s not important, [but] I think that when you’re learning something if you’re not applying it right away it makes it very easy to just forget it. (Student docent #36, 2008)

Several students recommended drawing on the expertise of active docents and inviting them to discuss developing and leading tours during fall quarter classes. The student who found the final tour stop helpful remarked, “If we were actually talking to docents right from the beginning, maybe even interview them ourselves, [we could find] out their strategies and [ask] questions. How they approach a tour; that would really help” (#36, 2008). One of the staff members who participated in the training observed the willingness of active docents to share their perspectives.

It is such an experiential thing that you’re teaching. I maybe would have picked more moments to bring in more of our active docents and engage them...in talking or discussion. Because they would. And some of them are incredible docents and have been doing this for years and years. And some put an unbelievable amount of thought into every aspect of their touring. And so just moments I think to get their perspective, just very directly in that classroom setting before you get into the galleries, before you start talking to them one on one. I feel like it’s almost too late at that point. (Wexner Center staff/Student docent #34, 2008)

I have found no essay in the literature that clearly outlined strategies for how to facilitate a discussion. However, Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee’s (2005) “The Art of Teaching
in the Museum” provides a thoughtful basis, and this essay is in the course syllabus. Given understanding how to foster quality discussions is a skill that takes time and practice to develop, this may be a topic for further research.

**Winter Quarter: Structure**

The format for the winter quarter was that of an independent study; no weekly class periods were scheduled. The students I spoke with overwhelmingly indicated they would prefer to meet on a regular basis throughout the quarter. Students felt the lack of classroom structure hindered their ability to transition from practicing basic tour components to actually working with the public in the galleries. “I feel like it would be better to have some [class] sections winter quarter. You go from regular classes and then the exhibit switches and you’re just out there…It’s a hard transition to make” (Student docent #9, 2008). Other students felt hearing about classmate experiences would help to prepare for their own tours and avoid a “sink or swim” feeling.

For [the winter] quarter it would be better to see people. It’s a lot on your own when you’re not quite prepared yet. Shadowing a tour is very, very different from participating in a tour. So it’s a big jump, both in what we’re doing and how the whole class functions. It was nice, all the regular docent things we could come to. [They were] helpful, but I would like to be with just our class again. (Student docent #29, 2008)

One student noted that meeting regularly would also help him or her to get a handle on the entirely new subject matter of the exhibition.

I knew Wegman in and out after last quarter. And this [exhibit], I’ve been reading it and I’ve gone to the sessions, but still we were exposed to Wegman every week last quarter. And compared to this quarter, I don’t know much about these [artists]. (Student docent #11, 2008)
These quotes suggest the importance of maintaining ties with original class members during the training process to share experiences and strategies for new exhibit material.

**Exhibition Materials**

Several docents noted the difficulty of learning new material each time the Wexner Center changes exhibitions, a challenge compounded by the fact exhibits present contemporary art work, which often does not have much background literature available. To assist docents, staff for the docent program compiles an exhibition binder with as much material they can find relating to the exhibit and the artist. While students did not specifically comment on the usefulness of the exhibition binder, three community docents did. One of the docents described the binder as a “wonderful” resource, but the other two community docents were more ambivalent to the binder’s usefulness (Community docent #30, 2008). One indicated doing most of the research for an exhibit online. The other docent felt there might be too much information in the binders and much of it becomes redundant. This results in inefficiency for both the docents reading the material and the staff who compiled it.

And what a lot of work that goes into them. There’s a lot of effort thrown into them, is it effective? Sometimes it works. Now I can run through the internet, I know how to use Google and I know how to use the other search engines. So I can get all that information for myself. Some of the other docents wouldn’t be able to. But a common complaint I hear from the docent group, which is a very silent complaint because nobody likes to be seen as ungrateful, but there’s a question of relevance. On somebody like [Lee] Lozano, who’s been around a long time, the critics are regurgitating the same critical pieces of information [and] you’ll find the same information in a half dozen places in the binder...So perhaps it needs a volunteer docent to...help. (Community docent #3, 2008)
While I too found the binder extremely helpful, there were numerous articles that repeated the same information. Soliciting a trusted docent to run a redundancy check on these articles could save both the Wexner Center and the docents time.

The staff also transcribes curator and artist talks that are part of gallery learning sessions. Several individuals noted the usefulness of these transcriptions. One docent finds these transcriptions more helpful than exhibition binders.

One thing that I find helpful as I’m going through preparing for tours are either the artists or the curator gallery talks. If I can get a curator walk-through and get it recorded on paper to me, that is more helpful than anything they give as far as information. If I can just get that to hear them talk about their reasoning, to hear them say why they put this here, that’s helpful. (Community docent #6, 2008)

I found these transcripts to be particularly useful when I could not attend the lectures but do not view them as a replacement for exhibition binders or other research.

*Gallery Learning Sessions*

With each new exhibition, the staff provides docents a calendar of learning opportunities. These include gallery learning sessions with curators and artists, brainstorming sessions and check points with staff for developing tours themes and ideas, and public programs related to the exhibition. A copy of the Winter 2008 Docent Calendar can be found in Appendix B. Students who attended these events found them to very effective. One student stated,

Helpful. Definitely helpful. I actually did one with Tracie. There was just a really small group of us that had to make it up and it was really fun. We had a really good time discussing the work. It was maybe five people and definitely that’s when I learned the most about these galleries. (#11, 2008)
Unfortunately, scheduling conflicts prevent both student and community docents from attending all of the learning sessions they want. Students noted that busy class schedules were typically the source of conflict. They also expressed regret and indicated they felt less prepared for tours and new exhibitions as a result.

The only problem that I’ve run into is that a lot of the learning sessions this quarter I can’t go to because I have class. So I think some things that were maybe specifically later [in the day]. I know that works for a lot of adult programs. But it sucks because I totally want to be there but I can’t skip class. (Student docent #14, 2008)

A student from the pilot year who is now inactive indicated that time constraints such as these were one of the primary reasons (s)he was now inactive.

Time constraints were a huge pain because they started having gallery brain storming sessions and I could hardly get to any because they were all in the morning and that’s when all my classes were…during the winter and spring. I was really busy in the spring and I could hardly go to any. Especially lectures [and] gallery talks by the curators, it was just really hard to schedule time to get to everything. Because of that sometimes I didn’t feel like I had the knowledge of the preparation that I could have…. It’s just an issue of being a student. When you have the student corps there isn’t going to be any way all our schedules will fit. (#20, 2008)

One community docent noted they were unable to attend sessions because they are either scheduled during the work day, or early evening, when (s)he cannot attend. However, this docent did not seek to change the docent calendar. Rather, (s)he relied heavily on transcriptions from curator talks and felt those, in addition to Internet research, provided the necessary information.
Like other students, my schedule was very hectic and I was only able to attend a handful of sessions. (A schedule of my participation in all docent-related events throughout the year can be found in Appendix G.) I relied on the exhibit binder, transcriptions from artists’ lectures, a brain storming session, and conversations with mentor docents to learn about the winter 2008 exhibition. I also felt that if I had attended more learning sessions and/or lectures I would have been better prepared for my co-tours.

However, Tracie McCambridge does not intend or expect every docent to attend every learning session listed on the docent calendar. It would be impossible to schedule events at times when all docents could attend. Although they are invited to attend any event they want, docents are encouraged to do so only as they deem necessary or if the session is of personal interest. A recent discussion on the National Docent Symposium Council’s listserv revealed that there is no consensus in the field about requiring attendance at training sessions, or making them optional (Meier, 2008). Institutions must balance views of docents as volunteers and as professional volunteers, and decide what works best for the size and shape of their program.

Scheduling Co-Tours

Students expressed frustration with scheduling co-tours. The process of signing up for tours using The Ohio State University’s Carmen website was discussed in detail in Chapter Four. While there were no technical issues, high demand for co-tours left students scrambling to sign up for a limited number of time slots.

I think [signing up for tours is] kind of chaotic because of Carmen’s discussion board. I think there might be a better way to do that. And I know that [the staff] tried to make it as easy as possible. It’s a free for all to get something you want…Then there are overlaps and people get cancelled out. (Student docent #28, 2008)
The only thing I would say is that if it’s just because there’s a low tour volume this quarter, but because of the size of the program it’s difficult to feel like you’re progressing. You have these three co-tours and this exhibition opened in February. It’s almost April and I’ve gotten one done… It’s just been hard because… the day it was posted it was like, I gotta sign up immediately because it’s all gonna be gone. There are 40 kids trying to sign up. Maybe it would be easier if there were less students involved. I don’t want to say competing for spaces but that’s what happening… I’ve had to wait a month. (Student docent #11, 2008)

This last quote alludes to one of the reasons co-tour scheduling was difficult during the winter 2008 exhibitions at the Wexner Center. Kerry James Marshall, Adi Nes, and the three artists in Solitaire did not have the same popular appeal and attracted fewer visitors than blockbuster exhibitions such as William Wegman: Funney/Strange. This translated into fewer co-tour opportunities overall for docents-in-training.

I too found it difficult to schedule co-tours. I read the first co-tour schedule within hours of its initial posting but did not have my calendar available to know when I was available. When I checked the website again, approximately two days later, about half of the tours had already filled. I was not able to schedule my first co-tour until a month into the exhibition, and the second tour two weeks after that. This challenge was compounded when the walk-in tour I was scheduled to do was cancelled when a double-booking occurred. A very busy spring schedule has prevented my completion of the co-tour process and attempt at a solo tour.

Wexner Center staff recognizes the tour shortage and allows students to continue co-tours into the spring quarter and beyond.

Despite its challenges, the Carmen process is more efficient than every student e-mailing staff members. One student suggested improving the co-tour sign up process by using an interactive calendar or creating individual discussion boards for each tour. This would streamline the process even more, save the staff time, and avoid any time lag between requests and the posting of an updated schedule. For this to work, staff members
would have to develop clear policies for the number of tours one could sign up for and how to make changes, when necessary.

*Working with Mentors*

Mentor docents can be any active docent who has completed the training process. As the student program continues, more mentors may be the same age and peer group as those in training. However, students noted that, with few exceptions, most mentors were community docents from a different generation, and the comments collected reflect an intergenerational partnership. Students frequently stated they would prefer to meet with mentor docents prior to the co-tour process. This was seen as a way to tap their knowledge sooner and be more prepared to structure tours and interact with visitors in the galleries. One student commented, “Maybe we should have been talking to docents way before we started doing co-tours. We should have had an idea of what was going on way before” (#36, 2008). A second student concurred, “Sometimes it felt kind of like we were thrown into their arms in the second quarter…It would have been nice to foster those relationships earlier” (#10, 2008).

In general students felt mentor docents were very flexible when deciding how to structure the co-tour, perhaps too flexible. Because several of the students I spoke with felt unprepared for the touring process after the fall quarter, they sought advice from the mentor docents. Some mentors provided very structured guidance and others provided very little. One student commented, “Some of the docents give you a lot of freedom but others want it really structured. I don’t know which one is more helpful” (#9, 2008). Another student stated,
Many of the regular docents [did] not want to tell me what they do because they wanted to see how I would approach it. It’s like, “I’ve never done this, I don’t know how I approach it; I kind of want to see how other people approach it.” (#29, 2008)

Finally, a third student remarked,

    Yes, they’ve both been great. I kind of thought there would be a bit more of a, “Here’s the way to do it,” kind of a mentality. And not at all, absolutely not at all. They’ve both been like, “Well why don’t you just give the entire tour.”…I was like “Ummm, actually I don’t think it’s supposed to work that way.” (#10, 2008)

When I spoke with the community docents about their experience as mentors, they reaffirmed the students’ perceptions of their flexibility.

    [T]he way that I approach it is, ask the student how they want to do it. And some of them are kind of reluctant; they don’t want to be first. Or there’s a particular exhibit that they’re not comfortable with it. So they all have a little bit different of an approach. Some of them want to co-tour, some of them just want to do one exhibit by themselves. And…I have to be more flexible….It’s definitely more of a challenge than having total control of a group…but I also really like it. And sometimes I get such good ideas from them. They have the grasp of the facts usually that I think is really impressive. I mean they’ve obviously really studied. (#2, 2008)

Only one of the student docents I interviewed stated a preference for who they were paired with for co-tours. This student pointed to the difference between docents who tour using a discussion-format and those who still lead lecture-style tours.

    I want to sign up for docents instead of tours. There are some people I’m just not interested in touring with…There were people there who were conducting tours in a way that we were being taught to do it and there are old school people there doing what they’ve been doing for the last 30 years. And I didn’t enjoy those tours and I don’t want to teach like that. So I don’t want to co-tour with somebody like that. (#27, 2008)

This scenario is not likely to occur. While Tracie McCambridge wants docent tours to be discussion-based and for docents and docents-in-training to share and further this goal,
she is also very concerned with treating all docents respectfully and avoiding hurt feelings. Such a system would no doubt create “winners” and “losers” amongst those active docents whose co-tour schedule is filled quickly and those that are not. Although some docents may prove more “popular” than others, if a docent is not leading discussion-based tours, they are not meeting the standards the Wexner Center education department sets for itself and its visitors. The literature is clear that while evaluation of volunteers can be uncomfortable, setting clear, reinforced expectations is preferable.

I had a different experience with each of my mentor docents. I met with my first docent a week before the tour, as instructed; (s)he was very flexible and initially asked if I wanted to lead the whole tour myself. We worked out a shared plan and I had the whole week to prepare. Both the second and third mentor docents were unable to meet me until 45 minutes prior to the tour. The second already had a format (s)he liked to use and asked where I wanted to contribute. The third indicated it was up to me, but quickly made several strong suggestions that I did not challenge. The first experience was a true co-tour partnership that I felt worked the best and with which I was most satisfied. The second co-tour was cancelled, and the third did not go as well as I had hoped. After a month-long hiatus from co-touring I anticipated recalling the material with ease and having an experience similar to my first. When neither of these were the case, I was caught off guard, frazzled, and displeased with the tour. In my co-tour reflection I referred to the experience as a “train wreck,” and I have since discussed it with other docents as an example of how not to lead a tour. My second co-tour likely would have been improved if we had met a week in advance and I was prepared for the dramatically different format.

Students and community docents both enjoyed working with one another and learning from the other party. Students were impressed with the community docents’ knowledge and willingness to share advice and help. One student echoed the voice of many other students.
They just have so much experience. I was talking to two of them and they were talking about 10 years ago [when the Wexner Center] had this exhibit and 20 years ago it was something else. They have a lot of information and it’s really helpful to hear about their experiences. (#9, 2008)

One student spoke to the reciprocity of the mentoring process.

After speaking with them after the tours, you realize that they’re getting as much out of it as you are because they say, “Oh! I never though about doing that or asking that,” or “I’m gonna use that the next time that I give a tour.” And I’m thinking the same things about them. (#10, 2008)

The community docents were equally impressed with docents-in-training. Community docents used the phrases, “They keep me on my toes” and “It’s really fun and stimulating,” to describe the process of working with student docents (#30, 2008 and #2, 2008). One community docent commented on the skills novice docents demonstrated, “I can tell you I’ve gone around with students who’ve done their part of the tour, and the program at the Wexner is superior in every single way to docents who’ve been doing it for decades” (#3, 2008).

Although docents-in-training and active docents do not spend much time together beyond the co-touring process, they developed a personal respect for one another and interest in the other’s experiences.

One of the docents that I worked with was really interesting to talk to. It was actually during the primaries and she was really interesting. I met her to have the co-tour that day but no one showed up and we just ended up talking for like an hour about politics and she was really interesting. It was really cool to have that connection. (Student docent #11, 2008)
There was another woman, [she’s] awesome. You should totally just sit down with [her] and have a conversation. She has a ton of experience and she’s awesome… That is one good thing about the program, you get to talk to people in the community. You get to have an experience with them. She was fun to talk to. (Student docent #20, 2008)

One of the community docents saw the students as social and intellectual equals, “It’s nice to have contact with younger people who are on an equal footing, rather than my kids or their friends [where] you’re in the mom role…There’s none of that with the student docents. It’s just a peer” (#2, 2008). This same docent also noted making a connection with one of the students and felt a friendship could develop over common interests.

**Summary and Recommendations**

Several themes emerged from discussions about training during the fall quarter. Students liked the content of the training; students responded positively to the readings, assignments, and guest lecturers; and students liked the course format and split of time between lectures and practicing strategies in the galleries. There was, however, some division about the timing of the course with some seeking more time in the galleries to practice leading discussions and tours before doing so in the final project and making the transition to co-touring.

The second phase of the docent training process at the Wexner Center was both challenging and rewarding for students. Students expressed a loss of classroom cohort identity and wanted to meet regularly throughout the quarter. This would improve communication with classmates, allow students to share experiences, and help them grasp new exhibition material. Students who attended gallery learning sessions found them
helpful, but several were not able to attend due to scheduling conflicts. Scheduling is an important concern throughout the training process and one reason some students are not able to continue their participation. The staff recognizes it is incredibly difficult to find a time that works for everyone. Therefore, they make every attempt to accommodate scheduling needs, such as offering some learning sessions more than once and allowing docents-in-training to take as long as they need to complete the co-tour process.

Students also realized they needed more guidance on how to lead discussions and develop a basic tour structure. This created a challenge when students and community docents partnered to lead co-tours; students did not know how to begin the planning process and each community docent had their own approach. The disconnect between student and mentor docents during the co-tour planning process speaks to the need for increased preparation and clearer lines of understanding between student and mentor docents. This may be achieved through some combination of the following:

- Invite active docents to discuss their experience and strategies with the fall class
- Invite training and active docents to meet on their own time outside of class
- Develop a basic guide for docents-in-training to use when structuring their tours
- Provide docents-in-training with the opportunity to practice structuring a tour before the winter quarter
- Clarify who will take the lead in structuring the co-tour.

Given both parties in the co-touring process are interested in creating a positive experience for visitors, better preparation before the co-tour process begins could help ensure improved tour quality and more rewarding mentoring experiences for all parties
involved. Despite some challenges, both students and community docents reported a mutual respect and admiration for one another and made personal connections.

The training process is designed by the staff to develop participant ideas of what constitutes a quality gallery experience and the docent’s role in fostering that experience. This chapter will now turn to an exploration of what docents at the Wexner Center view as their role in the galleries.

The Docent’s Role

Docent program administrators at the Wexner Center for the Arts expend many resources to train individuals to conduct gallery tours that focus on dialogue and inquiry. Staff members expect and hope the training has instilled in participants an understanding of the docent’s role that aligns with the Wexner Center’s pedagogy and program goals. If the new docents cannot articulate these roles, it suggests the training program has not achieved its goals. This section considers the alignment between student and community docent perceptions of their role with those of program administrators. Director of Education Shelly Casto and Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs Tracie McCambridge are clear about the roles they want docents to fill at the Wexner Center: guides who foster dialogue and serve as stewards of the institution.

Fostering Dialogue

The primary role for all docents is to engage the public in an open dialogue about art. Each tour should be a high-quality experience that encourages active looking and exploration. The docent should not present a single, authoritative interpretation of a work
of art. Rather, the docent’s goal is to empower visitors and guide them through the experience of investigating a work of art. The experience should encourage visitors to make connections with the art and with one another. In our interview, McCambridge (2008a) explained the goal for tours.

The docent’s goal is to have the visitor walk away feeling like they’ve thoroughly investigated a piece and they had an experience with their fellow group members to come up with a collaborative interpretation that was driven by their own inquiry and looking at the piece of art.

Interviews revealed that both students and community members understand this role.

Many students and community members described their role as a docent in terms of fostering conversations among visitors. The purpose of these conversations is to ask questions and to create an experience that engages the visitor and encourages them to look closely at the art and share their own ideas.

I don’t want to say lead people through the gallery; I’d rather say have a conversation in the gallery. Docent does mean “to lead” in Latin, but it’s more important to have a discussion and break down the barriers in a museum, make it a public experience instead of an institutional experience. (Student docent #20, 2008)

I am the “encourager” to look. Nothing is really wrong with the group members’ commentaries in my eyes—I just help to bring the conversation back in the right direction. I am a facilitator, and if I succeed I drive home on cloud nine. (Community docent, Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008c)

One docent emphasized the importance of dialogue and how it is fostered, “If you want a bottom line…about what it is to be a great docent, I’ve thrown out probably more questions than answers, and that may be what it takes” (Community docent #3, 2008).

The education offices at the Wexner Center have several bulletin boards reserved for the docent program. In addition to photos of each docent, important announcements,
and articles of interest, several docents have posted their thoughts on the docent’s role.

One of the community docents I did not interview posted a description of the way they approach a tour; the ultimate goal of these strategies is to get visitors engaged.

[How do I start?] I might give a brief introduction, give a bit of pertinent background information about artists, movements, significant events relating to when or why these works were created... Or I might ask them to look around the gallery for a minute and then tell me/us what their spontaneous basic reaction is to what they are seeing. If I succeed, they (or some of them) will feel comfortable enough to share an impression, a comment, or a question. Thus, an opening, a chance for interaction and exchange of thoughts will have been created--an opening, which I will eagerly pick up and use in my approach to the next steps in the tour. Ultimately, my goal is to get them involved--at least mentally, and if possible verbally, too. In the end, they might feel that they have discovered something new about art and about themselves.

In an article with The Ohio State University’s newspaper, The Lantern, one of the student docents from the pilot year described his approach to tours.

I ask, how can I make the art and objects meaningful? Art is communal, and I want to emphasize that...Description is the first part of interpretation. It's up to you in the end to find meaning in the works you encounter. (Simmons, 2008, February 2)

The strategies used by docents at the Wexner Center during tours place visitors at the center of the experience. Interpreting art is not the sole purview of academics and the museum. Rather, interpreting art can and should be the role of anyone who encounters it. This view stands in stark contrast with the traditional, lecture-style tour format used by many docents, which one of the students I interviewed spoke out against.
I guess I’m kind of opinionated about what docents do now. When I go to different museums and they just approach the work in a very boring way or just talk to the whole time, I have a big problem with that…We went to [another museum in Ohio] and had this docent and I just found the experience so boring and so kind of placating in the way we talked about the work…You kind of have to be an engaging person and you have to be enthusiastic about the work itself. You’re there to present the museum, but you’re also there to talk about art and have a look at art. (#28, 2008)

I did not interview all of the docents and cannot comment on each individual’s touring styles and goals. However, descriptions from both students and community docents I did speak with reflect the program administrators’ views that tours should be discussion-based experiences that encourage viewers to make their own meanings which flow from looking closely at objects in the galleries. This role speaks to one of the primary roles of a 21st century museum outlined by the Smithsonian Institution: facilitator of civic engagement (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2002). As discussed in Chapter Two, bonding and bridging social capital are necessary components of an engaged citizenry. When docents facilitate conversations that lead to collaborative interpretations and connection, either among an eighth grade classroom or a mixed age group of individuals during a walk-in tour, they are bonding and bridging social capital.

*Stewards of the Institution*

Shelly Casto also charges docents with serving as representatives of the institution and conveying the Wexner Center’s mission to visitors.

It’s about making sure that the public in general is engaged with contemporary art. [It is] a great opportunity for discussing contemporary issues, for engaging with other people, and for understanding the focus and mission and purpose of the Wexner Center. (Casto, 2008)
In addition to providing a laboratory for the exploration of contemporary art, the center is committed to the university’s mission of education, research and community service.

Docents are ideally positioned to communicate what the center is all about because they have regular, direct contact with visitors. Casto also alludes to another role of the 21st century museum: moderator of (contemporary) sensitive social issues (Office of Policy and Analysis, 2002). Contemporary art often deals with challenging, often provocative, issues confronting society, and the Wexner Center is committed to presenting these types of exhibitions. For example, from May to August 2008, the center presented, *Jane Hammond: Fallen*, which features hand-made leaves inscribed with the full name of each U.S. soldier killed in Iraq; *Fallen* is a living piece that continues to grow as more soldiers die. Docents are charged with making this type of art and the Wexner Center itself accessible to all visitors.

Student and community docents touched on their role as stewards of the institution in several ways. Docents see themselves as representatives of the institution, as individuals charged with making the visitor feel comfortable in the galleries and inspiring them so that they continue to explore art and, ultimately, return to the center. One of the community docents described them self as an ambassador for the Wexner Center who has a profound influence on the visitor’s experience.

As the docent you actually become the face of the Wexner Center. Patrons are not going to know the director of the museum, the director of education. They’re going to know the docent. They’re going to know that first person they see that’s going to take them through and tell them about the shows. So you are essentially an ambassador for the Wexner each time you lead a tour. So depending upon the way you present yourself, that’s the impression you’re going to have on that patron. And if that patron is willing to a) come back, b) invest more time in the center, or c) even go as far as supporting the center financially. (#6, 2008)
Docents are also keenly aware that many visitors feel uncomfortable in museums because of preconceived notions about museums and art. This is particularly challenging in contemporary art museums where much of the art is abstract, experimental, and difficult to understand. Docents believe it is their job to dissuade fears and make the art accessible.

A big part of your role is just making people feel comfortable with the whole experience; being in the museum, being around the art, being asked to talk about it. Because a lot of people really aren’t comfortable and have so many preconceived notions about how it will be. I think it’s really, really important to make them feel comfortable, make them feel like this isn’t a scary place and it’s going to be fun. (Student docent #14, 2008)

As an art student, I’ve noticed that a lot of the public is either alienated, distrustful, or apathetic about contemporary art. In addition, all the museum tours I’ve attended prior to being introduced to the Wexner Center’s docent program have been walking lectures, oversaturated with trivia and lacking relevance to daily life. My goal as a docent is to catalyze deeper interpretation and slow down the art-viewing experience…The more time one invests in scrutinizing what can be seen, the more intimate and poignant artwork can be. (Student docent, Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008c)

Once docents have broken down initial preconceptions and barriers, they hope personal connections made during interactive tours will inspire visitors to continue exploring art. The docents at the Wexner Center for the Arts seek to foster the viewer’s personal connection by showing visitors how art is born from life, how art influences life, how art can evoke countless emotions, and how art tackles pressing social and political issues. One student docent stated, “I think if the docent does a good job they have an opportunity to open the minds of people” (#36, 2008). Two other community docents spoke about the connection between art and life.
Every docent's role is to introduce others to a world that is always interesting and forever constant and changing. A docent's soul food is art and the creativity of the human condition it reveals. As an educator, the docent's goal is to pass the passion on to others to enrich their lives. (#16, 2008)

I think you want [visitors] to go away with a good feeling about the Wexner Center, about the arts in general. This is all about our history and our ideas and our opinions about our life. It’s our life, what’s happening here is all about us. (#30, 2008)

Docents at the Wexner Center indicated they want the connections they foster to inspire visitors to continue exploring art. They also want them to come back to the center.

One of the student docents explained, “The bigger overall role would be to get these people more curious about the art work and to come back, either to this exhibit or another time. Or go visit another art museum” (#29, 2008). One community docent stated,

So you make a difference in one or two people’s lives and they come back here. And it’s such an enrichment…We enrich the lives of others, get them to come back. And I’ve had students at the end ask what does this do for me? And I say you should come back all the time, these are things that you’ll never forget; this will enrich your lives forever. (#30, 2008)

These goals speak to another role docents fill as stewards of the institution: audience builders. Docents interact with visitors from all demographics, from school children to college students to adults. When docents conduct themselves and their tours with the intent to inspire and encourage additional visits through conversation and connection they may build an audience for the center. It is important to note this outcome cannot yet be proven and the impact of an interactive tour will undoubtedly vary with each individual. Adults who self-select into walk-in tours may (or may not) already have an interest in art and visit museums with some regularity. School field trips certainly
include students with a range of interest in art. Falk’s (1998) research has shown that one of the primary indicators of an adult’s attendance at museums is whether or not they visited museums as a child. When docents create interactive experiences which make art personally meaningful and fun for students, the impact on their future attendance may be significant.

Overall, these findings indicate that docents, docents-in-training, and program administrators share the same goals and perceptions of the docent’s role: fostering dialogue and serving as stewards of the institution. No significant distinction was found between student and community member descriptions of the docent’s role. Because most community docents have not participated in the current version of the Wexner Center’s training program this alignment suggests both the training and culture developed by the staff communicate program goals effectively and consistently.

A Rewarding Experience

Institutions offer their docents a variety of tangible and intangible rewards to show appreciation and to retain these volunteers. Figure 1.3 in Chapter One outlined the benefits the Wexner Center offers docents. For community docents, benefits include complimentary film tickets, drink coupons, the opportunity to meet artists, and support the center’s mission. Student benefits include academic credit, a stipend, and engagement with the center. Tracie McCambridge (2008) describes the distinction between student and community docent benefits as “a fine line.” Some community docents have to be reminded that while students receive a tour stipend, they may be offered free tickets to performances at the Wexner Center and students are not. McCambridge also arranges for
special docent events, some of which are offered to all docents (such as a breakfast and discussion with artist Adi Nes), and others are offered just to community docents (such as the Winter Workshop Day which included a visit to local art-making sites).

When asked how docents at the Wexner Center respond to the benefits they are offered, Tracie McCambridge (2008) believes that while many of the community docents “would freak out if we stopped giving them parking passes and drink tickets,” few of them participate in the program because of those benefits. Rather, they are attracted by more esoteric rewards such as lifelong learning opportunities and engagement with the center, the university, and fellow docents. McCambridge did not comment on how students view the benefits they are offered. McCambridge is more than happy to provide these benefits as a thank you to docents in exchange for the countless hours they volunteer. I asked all the docents I spoke with, “What do you find rewarding about being a docent at the Wexner Center?” Their answers included personal gains, engagement with the art, meeting artists, and their experiences with tours. There were few distinctions between what students and community docents found rewarding.

All docents cited some form of personal gain from their involvement in the program. Student and community docents alike noted the benefits of the learning process, particularly at the Wexner Center where exhibits constantly change.

Being a docent at the Wexner Center seems to utilize another part of my brain that goes wanting otherwise. I love the challenge of postmodern art and how each artist requires me to develop new perspectives. My intellectual universe has expanded immensely. (Community docent #16, 2008)
I think it keeps you on your feet a lot. It exposes you to the contemporary art world. It’s really interesting to see the world from different perspectives...I think by leading tours it forces you to think about [the world] in different ways. (Student docent #9, 2008)

One community docent described the experience as a way to relax after a work week, “With all the things going on in the office, and then get here and you can decompress into the art work” (#6, 2008).

Several students described the opportunity as a way to develop their communication skills and make personal and professional connections. One student noted, “I think being a docent is very practical. You are just with people talking, trying to get ideas across. These are important daily needs. It’s just something everyone needs to be able to do” (Wexner Center staff/Student docent #34, 2008). Another student enjoyed conversations with fellow docents, something they had not found in other course work at the university. “I really loved the diversity of our classmates and being able to hear different views and questions and ideas from all across the university because I haven’t had that experience yet in other art education classes” (#10, 2008). Another student noted making professional connections with staff members and discovering the Wexner Center as a resource on campus. Only one student mentioned the stipend as a “nice, added reward” (#10, 2008). The answers provided by students and community members suggest that all docents at the Wexner Center find some personal benefit from their role as docents.

Except for the stipend, most of the personal rewards cited here can be found at any (university) museum. The comments on learning emphasized contemporary art and changing exhibits, something that separates the Wexner Center for the Arts from many
other museums. However, lifelong learning is frequently cited in the literature as a principal reward, and many museums present contemporary art and new exhibits.

Interestingly, students highlighted their interaction with the art, while community docents cited their experiences interacting with specific artists as rewarding. Several of the students saw the experience as a good reason to spend extended periods of time with art that leads to a deeper understanding and enjoyment. One student remarked, “When you take your time with [the art] you notice things. The work comes alive in this way that if you didn’t take a significant amount of time you just wouldn’t notice it, because you can’t” (#36, 2008). Another student simply stated, “There’s just something so magical about being in a space with art” (#10, 2008).

Community docents were energized by the opportunity to meet and interact with artists.

I’ve been fortunate that I’ve gotten to meet several of the artists when they come here...You know you get to go, “Hey, I read about you in this book,” then start talking to them. Carrie May Weems was here one year. I actually had met her in Minnesota and she stopped and said “I know you.” And I laughed and said, “Yeah, Minneapolis at the Walker Center.” She said “OK.” I go, “You were there with bell hooks.” And she goes, “That’s right!” So that was kinda cool. (#6, 2008)

It’s just so nice, some of these new artists that I normally wouldn’t ever know or get to know. People who come here, like Adi Nes, I would never get to know him...Last year we had a Sadie Benning exhibit and just a couple months ago I look at the Sunday Times and there’s an article about Sadie Benning. And I wouldn’t know that, and that’s exciting to me. So those are the things I find exciting. (#30, 2008)

Engagement with art and artists is outlined in the Wexner Center’s description of benefits offered to docents, as well as other docent program websites. However, neither is frequently cited in journals or other published articles. As previously noted, the literature
underscores learning opportunities, but I did not come across any articles discussing the benefits that result from spending extended amounts of time with the art itself. This may be because the docent field remains dominated by lecture-style tours that focus on fixed art historical concepts rather than object interpretation and engagement through actively looking. Interaction with artists is a benefit reserved primarily to docents at contemporary art museums, where many of the artists are still alive.

Finally, students and community docents find great reward in the tours they lead and the visitors with which they interact. Two student docents connected a rewarding tour to their role as a docent. One seeks to facilitate a conversation that engages visitors in an exploration of the art and the other makes art more accessible by giving visitors tools to explore art on their own.

I guess the rewarding part is when you can tell that people are paying attention to you and actually care about what you’re saying. That’s pretty cool. And at the end when they remember what you’ve seen and can give you feedback on what they liked about the tour. That’s good stuff. (Student docent #29, 2008)

I think the most rewarding thing [about tours] is seeing that students can approach a work on art in a way that you explained or showed them how at the beginning of the tour. By the end they figure out how to look at works of art. I think that’s what we’re trying to impart the most in them. Not necessarily the content or anything like that. But how to look at a work of art and understand it so they can take it and do it by themselves somewhere else. So by the end of it, they’re asking lots of questions and pointing out things I’ve never seen before. When they’re really engaged with the work and with each other, that’s incredibly rewarding to see. (Student docent #28, 2008)

The Graduate Assistant for the program who trained as a student docent explained that interacting with visitors was an addendum to his or her university education and an opportunity to hear different perspectives on art that informed their studies.
I think at least for me, because I’m in grad school too, just interaction with different age groups and undergrads and people from the community that come for walk-in tours, you gain a lot of different perspectives on art. And there’s a lot that you just can’t study in school and know about without hearing it from people…I don’t think I’ve ever had a tour that I haven’t enjoyed. (Wexner Center staff/Student docent #34, 2008)

The fulfillment that comes from leading tours and facilitating connections between visitors and the art is frequently cited by the literature. Many docents at the Wexner Center report that these intangible rewards are what make all the hard work worthwhile.

The literature stresses the importance of offering docents tangible rewards to show the museum’s appreciation. Docents at the Wexner Center did note that benefits such as the stipend, drink coupons, and parking passes are “nice” and show them that the center does appreciate their efforts. However, none indicated they would cease participation without them. Instead, docents at the Wexner Center emphasize the intangible rewards that come from their work. They find personal growth and gain in the learning process, in developing communication skills, and hearing diverse viewpoints when interacting with classmates and the public. Students enjoy having an excuse to spend more time with art and community members are excited to interact with artists. Not surprisingly, all docents find tours and interacting with visitors to be rewarding. A student docent may summarize it best:

[It’s] that sense of keeping it real. That’s just what really drew me to museums and art and art education in the first place. It’s the work itself. That interaction between people and the product is such a rich experience for me. (#10, 2008)

Although this section has noted where students and community members differ in what they find rewarding, I believe most participants from each group would agree on many of
the rewards of being a docent. It is also likely, that upon further discussion with these individuals and docents with whom I did not speak with, additional rewards would be described and shared.

How the Docent Program at the Wexner Center for the Arts Effectively Bridges Art and Academe

Previous sections have discussed the somewhat disconnected relationship between the Wexner Center for the Arts and The Ohio State University. While there is some distance between the two institutions, both can look to one another as resources and as complementary partners to missions that emphasize research, exploration, diversity, and community. The docent program at the Wexner Center is one example of a program that seeks to bridge the gap between university and museum by building a shared community. This section explores the docents’ perceptions of how the program successfully connects the center and the university. A description of how students and community members view the addition of a student component is followed by a brief discussion on how participants classify their experience (e.g. work experience or as a volunteer commitment). Participants also suggest the importance of effective leadership in the program’s success.

Adding a Student Docent Component

I asked students and community members to describe what they thought about the addition of a student component to the Wexner Center’s docent program. Student responses were overwhelmingly positive and pointed to numerous outcomes. The program engages and reflects the campus community (including specific departments), it
raises the Wexner Center’s profile and encourages more students to attend, and it fosters connections between generations. Perhaps because they are less engaged with the university, community docents spoke primarily about the impact of the students on their personal experiences in the program.

Students see the student docent component as one way to bridge the gap between the center and the university. Because academic credit is granted through the Department of Art Education and many of the participants come from the College of the Arts the program opens lines of communication between the two institutions.

I think the other piece is just that the Wexner, the education department at the Wexner, really would like to be more a part of the university. They’re always trying to think of ways to partner with the Art Education Department. And the people in Art Ed wonder, “Why isn’t the Wexner doing anything? How come they don’t want to work with us?” I think it’s kind of just a misunderstanding and this course is one way of trying to bridge the gap. (Student docent #27, 2008)

Program administrators also reach out directly to the student body. The Graduate Assistant for the program stated, “I think that’s what’s neat about the student docent program, is that they’re actually going out into the university and calling them in” (Wexner Center staff/Student docent #34, 2008). By engaging students in a program where they serve as the “face” of the Wexner Center, the institution begins to reflect the university community. Students at The Ohio State University now have the opportunity to interact with peers in the galleries, which may increase their engagement.
I think it’s a great idea because a lot of the docents are older and a lot of the people that come here are young. I think people can connect better [with] people that are about their age. I think they’re more willing to talk when they’re on tours. Not that they’re more willing to listen to you, I think they listen to the other docents, they just don’t have the [same] interaction with them. I’ve been a student and go on tours and I don’t say anything….It’s more like you’re just talking to them and not like [this is] a class that I have to take. (Student docent #29, 2008)

Reaching out to the campus also raises the Wexner Center’s profile and introduces the center to students who might not understand its purpose. One student described how student docents help build the Wexner Center’s, \textit{I want to be edgy and contemporary}, reputation because “they have young, edgy people talking about their young, edgy art” (Student docent #27, 2008). This student also pointed to the docent class as a new audience. “For every group of students that they give the class to, they’ve got another whole group of students who feel comfortable being here and coming to the Wexner; they know about it” (Ibid). Other students noted that their involvement in the program led other students to explore the center.

I think the community docents are great, but especially for interacting with a university, [adding student docents is] probably one of the best things they can do. I know a lot of my friends won’t come in, but they hear I’m doing this docent thing and then they get interested and say, “Oh, can I come on a tour with you?” You get to [reach] out into the university other than just being there. More students are involved in the main purpose of the Wexner Center. (Student docent #14, 2008)

It’s really exciting; I really like the fact that there are students in the Wexner Center. I’ve been to see galleries before, but I’ve never been on a tour. I think it’s exciting. I like that I’m able to talk to my friends that are in studios, art classes about what’s going on at the Wexner Center. I think it’s a little different coming from a student in a class. Because I can experience it; I can tell my friends that are students to come. That’s really cool… When you’re sitting in a three hour studio [class] on a Monday, you talk about everything. I can say, “Oh, go check out this gallery.” (Student docent #11, 2008)
This student noted that not only did their friends visit the Wexner Center, one is interested in signing up for the docent program next year.

The interaction between generations is seen as an exciting opportunity to share different perspectives. One of the program’s support staff, who also trained as a docent, described the benefits of developing an intergenerational docent program.

I think that what’s been so interesting about the student docent program is the addition of this new age demographic and I think we’re a pretty fortunate place and we’re in a pretty cool position because you have so many of your sort of archetypical older, retired volunteer docents. But then we’ve also got this really fresh young core. And the two mix. The two talk to each other a lot. So I think in many ways it extends [the Wexner Center’s] mission in that not only are we getting people to talk, and we’re using art to do that, but we’re getting people to recognize the fact that they live in a multigenerational environment within that arts structure. (Pandora, 2008)

Community docents who reflected on how student docents impact their experience asserted that the fresh perspectives are stimulating. The students are seen as peers who keep community docents on their feet. One community docent did comment on the positive impact the program will have on students, and in turn the impact those students will have on the larger community.

The students who are clever enough to take advantage of the Wexner Docent program for credit have my admiration. The center is a fabulous resource for OSU students. Just think how these students will fan out into their communities as adults and make very unique contributions that will enrich others as well as themselves because of their Wexner training. The benefits are immeasurable! (#16, 2008)

Participants view the addition of a student docent program component positively. They note a variety of outcomes, from building connections with and reflecting the campus community to building an important contingent of the university museum’s
visitors: students. A formal evaluation of the student docent program’s impact on attendance has not been conducted. If student attendance has increased, several external factors may also have influenced this statistic. However, the voice of students and community docents suggest that their direct engagement, word-of-mouth marketing, and reflection of the university’s major age demographic in the galleries has grown the center’s student audience.

Classifying the Experience

One of the initial hypotheses of this research was that a student docent program was one way to involve younger generations in volunteer activities. The first person I interviewed was a student who challenged this hypothesis. When asked if (s)he considered the program a volunteer experience, (s)he responded,

   I see it more as – not really volunteer, I feel like it’s almost more like an internship. Because you do get paid. I didn’t do it because I wanted to get paid, but I kind of saw it as experience I could gain [from] rather than helping. Not that I don’t want to help the Wexner Center, I just thought it would be really good experience for me professionally. (#14, 2008)

Although I anticipated the stipend would have some influence on student perceptions of the program, I believed the amount was too small to alter traditional views of docents as volunteers. Other students agreed with my first interview subject; one stated, “I guess I never thought of it as a volunteer experience in the traditional sense” (#20, 2008). A student majoring in Studio Art described the docent program as a way to further their education, “I guess a learning experience is how I think of it. I think it’s really good for me, too, being an art major to learn about what’s going on” (#29, 2008). Another student noted the program’s reciprocity, “I think of it as an adjunct to my education. I think if
you’re volunteering I think of it as giving more than receiving. With the Wexner Center I get a lot, the education you get back” (#9, 2008).

Other students described the program as a form of professional experience. “I viewed it as another chance to learn, to broaden my own horizons and get some experience in a museum” (#20, 2008). An art education student described updating her resume and adding the docent program as “work experience” (#10, 2008). While experience as a docent will be especially important to students seeking employment in the arts, the communication and leadership skills one develops as a docent are useful in any professional position.

One of the program’s support staff noted that several of the pilot year student docents have made a good amount of money by leading many tours, and some of those students might describe the position as a part-time job. None of the students I spoke with saw the stipend as a source of income, but they do think it is an added bonus. As one graduate student stated, “I was incredibly surprised that they would be paying…Pleased, but shocked. I would have done it, of course, without the money. But it’s a nice, added reward” (#10, 2008). This student also discussed the paradox of a volunteer position that provides a stipend.

Just the word docent makes me think of volunteer. So that’s why I think this is really a unique program in the fact that it’s both, in a way. You’re getting paid for a service that most people associate with volunteers....I think academic credit is sufficient as a reward for that. But again, I’m not going to stop them from handing me a pay check. I find it to be an interesting juxtaposition, kind of dichotomy that the regular docents don’t get paid, yet we do. I don’t know anywhere that attracts their docents by getting paid. (Ibid)
None of the community docents I spoke with commented on the stipend, suggesting they are unperturbed by the difference or did not feel comfortable discussing the issue.

When Shelly Casto insisted the program offer students a stipend for the tours, she anticipated it would be the benefit that allowed students to make the necessary time and participate. Indeed, some participants noted the benefit was a good marketing tool.

I think students would still be involved without it, but it probably draws more students with it. And not because, “Oh I want money from the Wexner Center;” it’s not enough that it’s income by any means. But I think it’s enough that if you don’t think you have enough time to do this but you’re interested, it’s like, “Ok I can make time because I’m getting something out of it.” (Student docent #29, 2008)

Student views of this benefit suggest that museums who are able to offer stipends may find they attract more individuals who previously did not think they had enough time to take on this endeavor. However, students indicated they would likely participate without the stipend and have described other motivations and rewards associated with participation. I came across only a handful of programs that compensate docents monetarily, suggesting this is not a regular practice. There are likely many reasons for this and may be a topic for future research; some may include: museums cannot afford to pay docents a stipend, museums do not view stipends as a motivating factor, and/or museums want to attract individuals who want to volunteer, not get paid.

The Importance of Staff

A recurring theme was the effectiveness of the docent program staff and the important role they play in creating a positive experience. Docents feel staff members promote a culture of flexibility and respect that makes the program work by meeting the needs of diverse individuals and adapting to challenges that arise. Individual staff
members were described as “accommodating,” “fantastic,” and “the most incredibly proficient management team.” Staff flexibility and communication directly impacted several docents’ experience in the program.

[The staff] seems really organized and really excited to help you. Every time I had a problem – last quarter I couldn’t do my stop at the same time as everyone else because I had a concert and they went out of their way to make sure I had a separate time to do my stop. They gathered up people from the education department to be my audience. They were all really excited to do it. It was really nice they went out of their way. They didn’t have to do that. (Student docent #14, 2008)

I felt the communication was great. I thought [the Graduate Assistant for Docent and Teacher Programs] was great, wow. Oh my goodness, she’s so on top of everything, always. Whenever I had a question, she’d get back to me right away. (Student docent #10, 2008)

Participants asserted this flexibility is reflected in program administration. A community docent explained, “That’s the nice thing about the Wexner Center…We have to follow rules and all that, but they kind of give us a lot of freedom…to do things in kind of our own way” (#2, 2008). A student docent noted, “I think that they’ve structured [the program] in a way that is good for everyone involved…It was kind of a laid back atmosphere and I enjoyed that. I think that’s how it should be” (#28, 2008).

Some community docents were able to compare the current administrative team to past supervisors and other docent programs they were and are involved with. One docent noted that Tracie McCambridge was the fourth docent supervisor during their tenure at the center, and described the docents as “lucky to have people to have people in the docent position to always be there for us” (#30, 2008). This docent further reflected on an experience at the National Docent Symposium Council conference, “I was sitting in these roundtable discussions and they didn’t have the support we have here. And I came back
feeling that we were really fortunate.” Another community docent compared the Wexner Center to another museum.

They’re really good to the docents and I have a basis of comparison, as a docent at [another museum in Ohio]. There’s a sort of an elitist attitude…at least among some of them. Not everybody. And I don’t see that here. And I don’t know why that is…[I]n general much more pleasant and, I think, appreciative. (#2, 2008)

This docent also appreciated that Wexner Center’s system for tour assignments is much more flexible and easier to manage than other docent programs which require long term commitments. Rather than require docents to lead a certain number of tours, McCambridge allows docents to participate at the level they are able.

I consider each round of exhibitions a fresh start. Some of our docents travel at certain points in the year and might sit out on a set of exhibitions. Because the volume of info that they have to learn per exhibition set is so great, I anticipate mini-burnouts on occasion. If a docent’s schedule or life becomes overwhelming and they need to take a break, we’re open to welcoming them back when they’re ready to run again. If a docent seems to be fading away without explanation, I’ll often call or e-mail and ask if they’re still with me. Usually, a lag in attendance or communication indicates that they’re simply getting overwhelmed and they need to step back for bit. When they’re ready, they come back with full energy. (McCambridge, 2008c)

This system can create obstacles. When tour volume is high, there may not be enough docents to meet demand and staff members must lead tours themselves.

Much of the Wexner Center’s flexibility, response, and ability to know each docent personally are a function of the program’s size (approximately 45 people). Tracie McCambridge often debates expanding the size of the docent corps when popular exhibits come through, but knows there are also exhibitions that bring in fewer tours. Additionally, she believes small docent programs yield valuable benefits.
I personally really like having a small group of docents. I know each docent by name. I know who they are. I often know what their spouse’s name is. It feels like a little family and that’s not something you can do at the [Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York]. Just because you can’t... I personally like it. That’s why I came on here. I like the small group… And like I said, it allows for flexibility. You can call people. [The Adi Nes breakfast and discussion] offered today, we just got the opportunity Friday…and I just e-mailed everybody. (McCambridge, 2008a)

McCambridge acknowledges the flexibility that so many of the docents appreciate about the Wexner Center is not possible for programs with larger corps. More participants require more structure and clear policies to govern a large program efficiently, effectively, and equitably.

My own experience in the training program and the process of writing this thesis concurs with other participants’ interaction with the docent program staff. The staff responds quickly to inquiries and problems; they are consistent, helpful, and friendly. Their flexibility allows individuals, including myself, to participate in the program at levels that are satisfactory to both parties.

Discussion

Interviews with one-third of the docents and docents-in-training described participant experiences in the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Motivations for participating in the Wexner Center’s docent program generally reflect those in the literature. Of note, students emphasize one of their primary interests in the program is to gain professional experience in a museum setting. The literature underscored the importance of tangible rewards to show docent appreciation. Docents at the Wexner Center did acknowledge that they appreciated benefits such as parking passes (for community docents) and the stipend (for student docents), but do not participate
because of them. As confirmed in the literature, participants at the Wexner Center find the learning opportunities, interaction with visitors, and personal gains (e.g. increased communication skills) rewarding. Largely omitted from scholarly literature is the engagement with art and artists cited by Wexner Center docents.

Participants also discussed their (dis)satisfaction with the training process. In general, students liked the content of the training, including readings and guest lecturers, and felt it gave them a solid foundation. However, several students felt they needed additional guidance on how to lead discussions and structure an entire tour. Facilitating a good discussion is a difficult skill to master and may be best learned by practice. The experience of veteran docents was seen as an important resource that students should be offered opportunities to draw on sooner. Developing these connections earlier could improve the co-tour process and lead to more rewarding mentoring experiences and better tour quality.

As assessment of the alignment between staff and docent perception of their role in the galleries revealed that the training program effectively conveys the docent’s role as facilitator of dialogue and steward of the institution. These roles meet the need of the successful 21st century museum which seeks to facilitate civic engagement and moderate sensitive social issues. Docents also spoke about the relationship between the Wexner Center and The Ohio State University, asserting that the student docent program is an effective way to bridge the two communities. The program engages and reflects the campus community, including specific departments. Each cohort of students becomes another group of patrons who in turn build audience through word-of-mouth. Relationships of respect and friendship that develop between students and community
members suggest that the docent program is also bridging connections with the larger Columbus community. Participants attribute much of the docent program’s success to a responsive staff and the positive culture of flexibility they create.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis investigated the Wexner Center for the Arts’ student and community docent program through the lens of its administration and the lived experience of staff and participants. I have discussed my interest in this case study, reviewed the literature on current trends in the museum and docent fields, described the methods I chose to investigate my case study and research questions, and identified the patterned and conflicting participant accounts of program administration, pedagogy, and experiences of the program. I examined the alignment between participant experiences and staff perceptions to assess the perceived achievement of program goals and effectiveness of the current training format and pedagogy. In this chapter, I will discuss my findings, their implications for the field, lessons I learned in conducting the research, and will offer suggestions for future research that might push the museum and docent educator fields forward.

Findings

My research suggests that the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts is a corps of individuals at the center of the successful 21st century museum’s commitment to public service and education. This research did not uncover information regarding the
extent of student and/or intergenerational docent programs in (university) museums. However, this study provides a framework for program administrators seeking to demonstrate the value of student or intergenerational docent programs to funders and other stakeholders. Viewed as important resources for creating social capital and building bridges to community and learning, museums may consider docents one of their most solid, long-term investments. This research seeks to push the field forward with sound suggestions for administering a student and/or intergenerational docent program, and cites the usefulness of specific components of a discussion-based training program pedagogy. Principle findings for this research study can be summarized by answering four questions: Does the docent program meet its stated goals? Is the training program pedagogy effective? What are effective strategies for this program’s administration? and, What is the value of a student and community docent program?

*Does the program meet its stated goals?*

The docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts has two overarching goals: 1) engage visitors in an open dialogue about contemporary art and issues, and, 2) convey the Wexner Center’s mission and purpose. Docents-in-training and active docents overwhelmingly described their role in fostering dialogue and encouraging active-looking among visitors. Gallery conversations emphasize the connection between art and life as well as the Wexner Center’s role in providing a forum for exploring this interaction. Participants described their role as stewards of the institution in various ways. Docents see themselves as representatives of the institution, as individuals charged with making
the visitor feel comfortable in the galleries, and inspiring them so that they continue to explore art and, ultimately, return to the center.

The student docent component serves two additional goals: 1) provide students an addendum to their education through providing practical experiences, and, 2) build the center’s student audience. Students classified their participation in the program as a way to further their education and gain professional experience. The methods chosen for this research do not allow me to comment with authority on the student docent program’s impact on student attendance at the Wexner Center. However, students did note that they felt more comfortable utilizing the center as a resource, and shared anecdotes in which they brought friends to the center or discussed their involvement in the program with other interested students. Of note, the literature led me to initially suggest that the docent experience would be distinguished between students and community members. This research indicates there may be little difference between generations who volunteer as docents. With few exceptions, students and community members share many of the same motivations, rewards, challenges, and experiences as docents.

These findings suggest that, yes, the docent program is meeting three of its four stated goals. Additional evaluation is necessary to determine the impact of the docent program on student attendance. Based on my analysis of the literature, I suggested two innovative roles docents could fill in museums: visitor research and program development advisors. Neither of these potential roles was supported by the data collected. I also suggested that students in this program could constitute a younger generation of volunteers in the arts, and the Wexner Center’s program could serve as a model for encouraging this next generation of arts supporters. Students did not view the
program as a volunteer opportunity, nor did they reference the subject of arts patronage. However, students did report a deeper engagement with the center and an interest in continued participation in the program. These may be potential indicators of future support of the center’s mission and the student’s engagement in arts programs and patronage activities.

*Is the training program pedagogy effective?*

The gallery learning pedagogy that guides the Wexner Center for the Arts’ docent program emphasizes dialogue, inquiry, and experience. Staff members created a course syllabus that features models of learning developed by researchers such as Abigail Housen, Philip Yenawine, Terry Barrett, and David Perkins. Tracie McCambridge (2008), while not emphasizing knowledge transfer, describes the type of tours that docents lead at the Wexner Center as collaborative experiences.

The docent’s goal is to have the visitor walk away feeling like they’ve thoroughly investigated a piece and they had an experience with their fellow group members to come up with a collaborative interpretation that was driven by their own inquiry and looking at the piece of art.

This goal represents an effort to empower views with the authority to read, view, interpret, and have meaningful relationships with works of art. Most participants stated that facilitating this type of experience is one of their primary goals as a docent. When describing rewards associated with being a docent, several individuals recounted positive experiences with visitors in the galleries who were interested and engaged with one another and with the art.

In general, students who participated in the 2007-2008 training program reported valuing its format and content. However, several students indicated that their ability to
facilitate a good discussion was not learned during the first phase of the training course, and was not supported systematically in the second quarter or training, leaving them feeling ill-prepared for co-tours. Students noted that working with mentor docents and leading real gallery tours improved this skill. They recommended making connections with seasoned docents early in the training process so they could engage in dialogue development exercises prior to leading co-tours.

I began this thesis with a quote from Terry Barrett (2008) about the nature of object interpretation.

To interpret a work of art is to make sense of it…It is to ask and answer questions such as: What is this object or event that I see or hear or otherwise sense? What is it about? What does it represent or express? What does or did it mean to its maker? What is it a part of? Does it represent something? What are its references? What is it responding to? Why did it come to be? How was it made?...What does it mean to me? (p. 7).

In order to facilitate understanding and meaningful connections that enrich the museum experience, visitors must engage in such dialogues with one another and with the object itself. With the training and practice that the Wexner Center provides, docents at the center are able to facilitate this dialogue, encouraging visitors to spend more than thirty seconds looking closely at a piece of art. Docents at the Wexner Center guide visitors through a process of object interpretation that can lead to collective and personal meaning-making.

What are effective strategies for this program’s administration?

Three factors can be identified as primary ingredients in the effective administration of the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts: 1) its size, 2) a
culture of flexibility, and 3) a responsive staff. Both docents and staff members pointed to the benefits of a relatively small docent corps. Staff is able to develop and maintain a personal relationship with each docent, and keep abreast of performance levels without relying on a formal evaluation process. The program’s size allows for a high degree of flexibility in terms of both docent responsibilities and general program administration. Docents are consistently reminded of the importance of flexibility in the galleries. The culture of flexibility that the staff reinforces permits the program to meet the varied needs of its diverse docent corps. Participants agreed that a primary reason the program successfully achieves its goals is because each staff member is open, responsive, and positive. Research indicates that there is some misalignment between staff perceptions and participant realities, and that some components of this young program need improvement. However, the staff is aware of many of these challenges and makes regular adjustments to the program to address docent concerns. Large docent programs do not have the same flexibility and intimacy that a small program, such as the Wexner Center enjoys. If the Wexner Center’s docent program continues to grow, the staff will need to be mindful of how this will impact their potential flexibility and responsiveness.

In addition to the successful ingredients discussed above, I identified the following “good practices,” that may be useful for other docent program coordinators who are developing student or intergenerational docent programs.

- If your program has an existing docent corps, bring them in on the planning phase for any changes to the program’s structure. Listen to concerns, explain the reason and goals for any changes, and clarify new or modified roles.
• Mentorship components are beneficial to novice and veteran docents. Involve veteran docents in training new docents; their experience will help students conceptualize the gallery experience. Facilitate meaningful connections through early and regular interaction to enrich the mentoring experience for both parties and open lines of communication.

• Maintain regular contact with docents throughout the training phase. Recruitment strategies which attract people who are unfamiliar with docenting (and even those who are), makes open lines of communication and clear expectations critical.

• Develop close ties with the university. Work with an academic department to provide credit that will increase student interest in enrolling in a docent program; campus-wide advertising might increase the diversity of the docent corps; professors from an array of departments (e.g. history of art, history, women’s studies, and sociology) can also be brought in to lead useful discussions on art, social issues, and training methods. These partnerships can further relationship and audience building across the university.

What is the value of a student and community docent program?

The value of this program is considered in terms of its service to four broad, sometimes overlapping categories: 1) participants (students and community members who trained and/or serve as docents), 2) the Wexner Center for the Arts, 3) The Ohio State University community, and 4) the central Ohio community.

In 2004 the Ohio Arts Council introduced the idea of public value as a measure for the success and impact of arts programs. Public value is a departure from traditional frameworks for supporting arts and cultural endeavors that define value as a transactional relationship between arts organizations and their supporters. Public value is more than audience statistics and financial impact; it describes transformational outcomes from art experiences that change lives and positively affect people, relationships, and
communities. Public value is demonstrated through stories of individuals’ experiences with the arts, stories such as those told by the docents I interviewed for this research.

One way to visualize public value is with a public value strategic triangle that conceptualizes an organization’s (or program’s) authorizing environment, operating environment, and value. Figure 6.1 adapts the Personal, Social, Relational, and Community Value Triangle for Organization or Artist presented in “New Frameworks for Revealing the Public Value of the Arts: From Transactions to Transformations” developed by Christy Farnbauch, Mollie Lakin-Hayes, and Jerry Yoshitomi, for the docent program at the Wexner Center (2004, p. 8). The authorizing environment includes formal and informal sources of legitimacy and support and the operating environment includes the resources and capacities that produce the docent program. These two nodes represent the traditional transactional model of public support for the arts. The value node reflects the transformational outcomes associated with the arts, including the program’s impact on individuals and the community. Here, the value of the docent program is considered for each of the stakeholder groups, as well as the overall impact.
Figure 6.1: Public Value Triangle for the Wexner Center for the Arts student and community docent program
Participants shared stories about their rewarding experiences in the docent program. All participants enjoyed learning about the Wexner Center’s exhibits. Students reported signing up for contemporary art classes for the first time, understanding how the public might react to their own artwork, and learning new ways to critique their own artwork as a result of being a docent. Community docents reflected on the friendships they have made and student docents described confidence that came from improved communication skills. Student docents also noted an increased interest in pursuing careers in museum education and improved discussions in classes they led as teaching assistants.

The docent program enhances the accessibility of the contemporary art at the Wexner Center, and it increases the center’s sustainability. Part of the Wexner Center’s mission is to provide a forum “where diverse audiences can participate in cultural experiences that enhance understanding of the art of our time” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008a). Gallery tours that foster dialogue about art and social issues, encourage visitors to look closely, and make the art personally meaningful increase the accessibility of contemporary art and serve the center’s mission. Each cohort of new students represents another segment of the student body that is comfortable visiting the center and using it as a resource. Widely distributed advertisements and word-of-mouth conversations between participants and their friends also increases interest in the center. Students and community members who participate in the program experience a deep engagement with the Wexner Center. Those who become regular visitors and members sustain the institution, and they become part of its authorizing environment.
A value of this program to The Ohio State University and central Ohio communities was inferred from participant and staff interviews and my personal experience of the program. Ohio State outlines five core values in its academic plan: “pursue knowledge for its own sake; ignite a lifelong love of learning; produce discoveries that make the world a better place; celebrate and learn from our diversity; and open the world to our students” (The Ohio State University, 2000, p. 4). Supporting the student docent program by providing academic credit allows the student body to pursue opportunities for lifelong learning and encourages the development of conversations that celebrate diversity, encourage discovery, and expose visitors to the world of contemporary art. The program also provides students critical professional experiences that will assist them when entering the work force, including skills that support public speaking and facilitating discussions.

The central Ohio community includes all student groups and visitors who take gallery tours at the Wexner Center. The interactive discussions that docents facilitate encourage collaborative interpretation and personal meaning-making. These experiences forge connections not only among visitors, but also between visitors and the art. Every docent at the Wexner Center for the Arts can recount tours in which they’ve seen visitors discover something new about art, about life, and about themselves. One student docent described these experiences:

I think that being a docent in the Wexner, not in another place, in the Wexner, you have the opportunity to open people’s minds. And I think that’s a really cool thing…You’ve got this amazing facility and all these really cool people to talk to [and] see what they really think…You[don’t] just open their minds, but yours as well. (#36, 2008)
Robert Putnam (1995) asserted the importance of social capital to a vibrant and engaged citizenry. Inquiry and discussion-based tours, as well as participation in a student and community docent program, provide examples of bridging and bonding social capital. Gallery tours at the Wexner Center allow all visitors to share and draw on their own experiences and opinions in order to engage in a collaborative inquiry. Docents bond social capital among visitors who are like, such as school groups, and bond social capital among visitors who are unlike, such as walk-in groups, by drawing out the emotional reactions and opinions that contemporary art and social issues inspire. Docents mediate these opinions and use their knowledge of the art and artist to challenge visitor assumptions with simple phrases such as, “What if I told you that…”

The student and community members of the docent corps at the Wexner Center for the Arts are examples of social capital production. Some docents share similar educational backgrounds or Ohio roots, while others have little in common with the rest of the corps. These participants are all drawn to the program by a shared interest in art, in the Wexner Center, and in meeting new people; as they develop friendships and respect for one another, they bond social capital. The intergenerational component bridges social capital; Pre-Baby Boomers, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millenials work together toward a common goal and foster a community of respect and genuine interest in understanding contemporary art and diverse perspectives.

The docent program also bridges social capital between the Wexner Center and The Ohio State University. These institutions share similar missions but typically pursue those ends using very different policies and activities. Although the program is based in, and largely supported by the Wexner Center, each institution provides important
resources that contribute to the program’s success. The docent program is one example of how these institutions are able to bridge social capital and serve their communities. This program is an example of one way the two institutions can work together to

The docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts builds bridges to learning and community. Docents who lead inquiry- and discussion-based tours meet the definition of education called for in the American Association of Museum’s (1992) *Excellence and Equity*, “a term that includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue” (p. 6). The docent program directly connects the center with the university and meets the needs of students who describe the program as complementary to their education, and as a practical and professional experience. Student docents reflect the university population and contribute to word-of-mouth marketing that encourages other members of the student body to utilize this campus resource. My research has uncovered an array of values associated with a student and community docent program that museums may use to garner support for this and similar programs. The next section discusses how these findings may support similar efforts in the field.

**Implications for the Field**

In this research I sought to push the museum education field forward by investigating one of the most common programs museums offer: docent-led gallery tours. I have made a strong case for the value of an uncommon type of docent program: a student and community docent program at a university museum. Despite its rarity, many of the motivations, rewards, and values attributed to this program may apply to museums who engage students of all ages.
The scope of this project allowed me to contact three other docent program coordinators: one ran a university student docent program in the South, one ran a community docent program in the Midwest, and one ran an intergenerational docent program at a university museum in the Northwest; all utilize variations of discussion-based pedagogies. The description provided by each coordinator of their program’s administration, challenges, and needs exemplifies the diversity of docent programs. However, insights from these practitioners illuminated several important concerns.

All of the coordinators identified the issue of student docent retention. The student docent coordinator from the South simply acknowledged the challenge of retaining docents after they graduate but the intergenerational coordinator from the Northwest described the use of limited resources to train transient participants in addition to long-term committed docents as “inefficient” (Docent coordinator #32, 2008). The community docent program coordinator noted that retention becomes a nonissue if the institution commits the necessary support structure without the expectation of retention.

To have a healthy student docent program, the university museum needs to make a commitment to year round sustaining efforts such as ongoing recruitment and ongoing mentoring. And that’s just because it’s a constantly changing population. But that also means it’s a constantly renewable source that can make for a very vital program and new perspectives. (Docent coordinator #26, 2008)

Potential solutions to increasing retention rates include recruiting new university student such as freshman, allowing students to continue on as docents after graduation, or offering incentives such as stipends. The community docent program coordinator did not seek to add a student component to the docent program, a role fulfilled by a neighboring
institution. However, (s)he did cite the importance of university students as interns, who also energize the institution with fresh ideas.

The coordinators also pointed to challenges associated with training student docents. The student docent program coordinator from the South cited a lack of resources for practitioners seeking to infuse docent programs with current museum education theory, such as discussion-based pedagogies. The coordinator from the Northwest noted that university students were more mature and constructed better tours than high school students, but they did not take advantage of one-on-one mentoring some community docents offered to provide. Both of these coordinators have considered increasing the program’s formality by either providing academic credit or asking professors to identify students then holding advisors accountable for content. The coordinator from the South sought ways to demonstrate the value of the program to the university, the museum, and funders in order to leverage support to formalize the program.

Findings from the literature and this case study point to several implications for the museum education field. First, museum educators may want to assess the capacity of their institutions to develop a student and/or intergenerational docent program. These programs serve new communities, attract new audiences, and afford a multitude of benefits to participants. However, staff size, workload, and commitment to a potentially transient docent population are important considerations.

Second, this research makes an unscientific case for the value of discussion-based pedagogies that enrich visitor experiences, allow museums to engage in a dialogue with their communities, and address important social issues of our time. While I have
highlights several successful strategies in this thesis, museum educators continue to need a comprehensive guide for training docents to use discussion-based pedagogies.

Third, the museum educator community would benefit from a larger dialogue on the administration and value of student and intergenerational docent programs. I suggest two avenues for reaching a larger number of museum educators: professional conferences and online discussions. Sessions on student and/or intergenerational docent programs at conferences for the National Art Education Association, the National Docent Symposium Council, and American Association of Museums might reach a large contingent of stakeholders. The most useful online forums that I discovered for connecting museums educators and sharing information and resources are the Museum-Ed website (www.museum-ed.org) and listservs for the National Docent Symposium Council and the Association of College and University Museums and Galleries.

This case study has argued for a renewed interest among the museum community in intergenerational docent programs as vital sources of social capital. In order to realize the full value of student and intergenerational docent programs and discussion-based pedagogies, museum educators need to become familiar with resources available to them, think about gaps in those resources, and how they might be filled.

Lessons Learned

The methods used this thesis helped me to answer the question, “What is the value of a student and community docent program?” Participant observation, autoethnography, and narrative interviews supported me in describing and assessing the program and its administration. I also considered the alignment between staff and
participant perceptions, and evaluated the perceived usefulness of the training program by recapitulating the experience of approximately one-third of the docent corps. While this study was not designed to be an exhaustive account of docent programs, two misjudgments on my account limited the thoroughness of this thesis.

First, the program’s pedagogy became a much bigger component of this research than I had initially anticipated. The questions I developed to guide my research were not inclusive of the program’s pedagogical aspects. However, as my research progressed it became clear that one cannot understand the program’s administration and/or value without considering, at least in part, how people learn and teach others to lead discussion-based tours. Because of this omission from my research design, the pedagogies discussed in the “Bridges to Learning” section of the literature review are not as satisfying a representation of the current debate in the museum education field as I would have liked.

To grow programs that effectively adopt discussion-based pedagogies and are structured to fit the needs of an individual institution, practitioners need a broad understanding of the literature and available research. My assessment of the training program is limited to participant perceptions and is not rigorously evaluated against the unfolding valuation of best practices.

Second, the time I was able to devote to this study became increasingly limited when I was offered and accepted a job in the spring. Committing to an additional part-time work load in the midst of the interview process hindered my ability to conduct interviews with additional docents and/or other docent program coordinators. The sample of docents I interviewed is representative of the demographic diversity of the docent program at the Wexner Center, but more interviews might have shed additional light on
my findings. Contacting more docent program coordinators could have provided useful perspectives that might further contextualize my findings and enhance my ability to make recommendations for the field. However, the literature and accounts from coordinators with whom I did speak indicate that docent programs vary significantly, and that without a comprehensive survey of museum educators, a handful of additional viewpoints would likely not have represented the entire field.

Suggestions for Future Research

This case study contributed to discussions on the administration of intergenerational docent programs and training that utilized an inquiry and discussion-based gallery learning pedagogy. My research was limited to docent and staff perceptions of these topics, and largely omitted the visitor’s perspective of the program. Three research projects might help establish a deeper understanding of how such work could serve the museum’s educational and public service missions.

1) Visitor Surveys. I did not find any surveys of visitors who take docent tours in my inquiry process. While it is possible that visitors who self-select into docent tours are a specialized audience, understanding who takes tours and their motivations for taking them could inform program goals, tour content, and marketing strategies. A survey of visitors who do not take tours and which seeks to understand their motivation for nonparticipation, could also inform this discussion.

2) Gallery Learning Study. A study of what visitors of all ages who take discussion-based tours learn might contribute to the generalizable knowledge concerning the most effective methods for gallery learning. Much of the research on learning in
museums considers visitor comprehension and retention of specific messages that exhibitions and related learning materials are designed to convey. The goals and anticipated levels of learning that a broader survey might address could challenge the field to consider the value of discussion-based gallery tours as specifically developed for each group.

3) *Handbook for the administration of student and/or intergenerational docent programs*. Museum educators can draw on several resources that provide information on how to administer community docent programs, and even primary student docent programs (see Sweney, 2007 and Carlson & McDonald, 2004). However, a resource that addresses the specific needs of university student programs and offers suggestions on how to integrate student and community docent programs could also be useful to museum educators seeking to establish, expand, or reinvent their docent programs.

**Final Thoughts**

My research on the docent program at the Wexner Center for the Arts has been personally enlightening, challenging, and rewarding. I have always admired docents who inspire an interest in and appreciation of art. Participation in the docent training program at the Wexner Center for the Arts has deepened my respect for these educators. I have never been fond of speaking in public, nor have I been adept at facilitating discussions, but the docent program has challenged me to practice these skills, which will serve me throughout my personal and professional life. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know other docents and hearing about their experiences. Like most graduate students, I have found the research process and completion of this thesis to be a demanding endeavor.
However, I am fortunate to know that the experience has afforded me a new community of friends in Columbus, and is an opportunity to engage in a living art history course that connects me to the art of today. I am confident that this research will contribute to the debate among museum educators over how best to meet visitor needs, and that it will revitalize the museum field’s interest in docent programs as bridges to learning and community.
APPENDIX A

NEW DOCENT TRAINING COURSE, FALL 2007 SYLLABUS
New Docent Training Course
Wexner Center for the Arts
595X/795X
5 Credit Hours
Autumn Quarter 2007
Fridays, 9:30–11:48 AM
Wexner Center Film/Video Theatre

Description
This course introduces student to the theory and techniques of teaching in art galleries at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Students will be trained to lead tours by studying contemporary art, strategies for leading tours, and techniques for encouraging interactive exchanges. Students who complete the course will be considered for acceptance into the active docent corps of the Wexner Center. This course meets in the Film/Video Theater of the Wexner Center, located at the intersection of 15th Avenue and High Street.

Contact information
GA for Docent and Teacher Programs
Wexner Center room #38

Tracie McCambridge
Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs
Wexner Center room #38

Shelly Casto
Director of Education
Wexner Center room #37

Office Hours:
We are in and out of our offices all day. You are free to stop by anytime (we can’t guarantee that we’ll be here) or contact us to arrange an appointment.

Credit & Advancement in the Program
Credit is available to all enrolled graduate and undergraduate students at The Ohio State University. Students will earn five hours of credit for autumn quarter and two hours for winter quarter through the Department of Art Education or History of Art.

The fall and winter quarter sessions of student docent training are considered separate courses. Winter quarter requirements will be made available to you once you have successfully completed the fall quarter. Winter quarter credit will be independent study credit, earned by working with experienced docents and preparing and presenting a public tour for evaluation by Wexner Center education staff.
If a student successfully completes the autumn quarter with a minimum grade of A or B (for OSU students) and the Wexner Center education staff feels it appropriate, the student will be invited to participate in the second phase of training during winter quarter. Students who successfully complete the winter quarter phase of training will be invited to join the corps of docents who actively lead tours at the Wexner Center. Each student’s advancement into the docent program is entirely at the discretion of the Wexner Center education staff and is not solely based on the physical completion of course assignments and tours.

Requirements for Successful Completion of Autumn Quarter Course
- Attend all required sessions and be on time (active docents at the Wexner Center are not late for their tours—please demonstrate your reliability on this front by showing up on time for the course). One absence will be excused with a good reason, advance notice to the instructor, and makeup of any required work.
- Complete all required reading.
- Participate in group discussions during class

Your participation includes being prepared and offering thoughtful comments throughout the course. Participation also means that you give your full attention during the class discussion, individual and group presentations and guest lectures, and asking questions and provide feedback afterward.

In this course, you are expected to demonstrate integrity, be responsive to the welfare of others, foster a positive classroom climate based on trust and mutual responsibility, and exhibit sensitivity to and respect for multiple socio-cultural realities, diversity and difference including, but not limited to, sexual identity, ability, class, race, gender, ethnicity, and age. This includes using suitable language, mannerisms and interpersonal skills.

Descriptions of and requirements for each of these assignments can be found on page 8 of this syllabus.
- Observe and record brief reflections on six tours during autumn quarter. These reflections will be due throughout the quarter.
- Complete three assignments:
  - Active Looking exercises (Oct. 12)
  - Audience strategy paper (Nov. 9)
  - Tour shadowing experience paper (Nov. 16)
- Present a successful “tour stop” to the group (Nov. 30):
- Maintain a positive attitude and the ability to communicate and respond to constructive criticism in a productive manner.

The processes and skills that you learn in this course are ones that take practice and experience. As you progress you will be given advice and critiqued on your performance. These suggestions are intended to help you grow as a gallery educator. Responding to criticism in a productive manner means that advice and suggestions are welcomed and reflected upon.
Communicate effectively:

We have a large group of active docents and docents-in-training. We rely on our active and training docents to maintain professional communication standards in order to help us keep the program and schedule organized so that we can focus our efforts on good gallery teaching practices. All docents communicate via e-mail in order to schedule all of their tours (whether observation, partnered, or independent). This means we must be able to rely on docents to 1) maintain an active e-mail account, 2) commit to actively checking this account at least once a week (this also means responding promptly to inquiries), and 3) proactively communicate with us if you suspect you are having e-mail account problems (e.g., not receiving e-mails, messages are bounced back, etc.) to foresee problems in case you have missed important information.

Autumn requirement weight:
Final presentation (Due Nov. 30): 20%
Assignments x 4 @ 10% each = 40%
   Individual tour reflections (Due throughout the quarter)
   Active looking exercises (Due Oct. 12)
   Audience strategy paper (Due Nov. 9)
   Tour shadowing experience paper (Due Nov. 16)
Attendance: 20%
Discussion/participation: 10%
Communication/professional conduct: 10%

Fall Grading Scale
A  93 percent and above
A- 90–92 percent
B+ 87–89 percent
B  83–86 percent
B- 80–82 percent
C+ 77–79 percent

Students with Special Needs/Disabilities: If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact us to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs, and explore potential accommodations. We rely on the Office of Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services (292-3307), we encourage you to do so.
Academic Misconduct: Ohio State professors are expected to report suspected cases of academic misconduct to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. (Find the university’s rules on academic misconduct here: http://acs.ohio-state.edu/offices/oaa/procedures.1.0.html.) The most common form of misconduct is plagiarism. Remember that any time you use the ideas or the statements of someone else, you must acknowledge that source in a citation. This includes material you have found on the web. The university provides guidelines for research on the web at http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor.

All docents are briefed on new exhibitions during the Docent Gallery Learning sessions. Attendance at either the September 17th or the 20th session is mandatory. These sessions can not be made up.

Monday, September 17
10 AM–12 PM
Docent Gallery Learning
Docents will learn about the works on display from Shelly Casto, Director of Education.

Thursday, September 20
6–8 PM
Docent Gallery Learning
Docents will learn about the works on display from Tracie McCambridge, Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs.

Topical Outline: Course schedule and readings are subject to change. Readings can be found on Carmen.

Friday, September 21
Intro to program
What does a docent do? Public speaking refresher with Mandy Fox, Assistant Professor of Acting and Directing in the Department of Theatre.

Friday, September 28
The architecture of the Wexner Center
Revisit the galleries

Reading Due:

• Wexner Center Winning Entry Proposal by Trott & Bean, Architects & Eisenman/Robertson, Architects.
• Work on reading the essays found in the docent exhibition resource binder.
Friday, October 5
Issues addressed by contemporary art
Forming a theme for your gallery learning experience
Exploring diverse perspectives in looking at art

Reading Due:

Friday, October 12
Learning to look and think through art
Teaching with questions

Active looking exercise due

Reading Due:
- Perkins, David, “Knowledge Gaps and Intelligence Traps,” The Intelligent Eye, pp 25-35

Friday, October 19
Constructing a tour
Working with adults and walk-in tours

Know your audience
The beginning, body, and conclusion of an adult tour.

Reading Due:

Friday, October 26
Working with teens
Tackling provocative issues in contemporary art

Know your audience
The beginning, body, and conclusion of a teen tour.

Reading Due:
- Burnham, Rika, “If You Don’t Stop, You Don’t See Anything,” Teachers College Record, Vol 95, Number 4, Summer 1994.
Friday, November 2
Object Safety with Doug McGrew, Wexner Center Senior Security Supervisor.
Working with elementary aged students
Know your audience
The beginning, body, and conclusion of an elementary focused tour.

Reading Due:

Friday, November 9
Appreciating diversity in our visitors and in our galleries with Vesta Daniel, Professor in the Department of Art Education.

Audience Strategy paper due

Reading Due:
- TBD

Friday, November 16
What have we learned?
Gallery activities and presentation prep

Tour shadowing experience due

Friday, November 23
NO CLASS: HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Friday, November 30
Final presentations

Friday, December 7
Final presentations (we will not have class on this date if all presentations can be completed on November 30)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

[www.vue.org](http://www.vue.org)
Perkins, David, “Knowledge Gaps and Intelligence Traps,” The Intelligent Eye, pp 25-35
Wexner Center Winning Entry Proposal by Trott & Bean, Architects & Eisenman/Robertson, Architects.
Assignment Requirements

Assignments may be handed in through Carmen drop box, e-mail attachment, or hard copy. Assignments will be docked one percent each day that they are late. Looking Log and Tour Reflection templates are available in this packet and on Carmen.

Active Looking Exercise (Due Oct 12):
In this packet, you will find three worksheets labeled: Looking Log #1, 2, and 3. Choose a work of art that you have not previously studied. It may or may not be on display at the Wexner Center. Follow the directions on the looking log worksheets to complete this assignment. This activity is not intended to test how much you know about any given piece of art. Do not research the piece that you choose for this assignment. It is intended to help you to slow down and simply but actively look at an object. These logs will take you step by step through the looking process that you will eventually lead groups through. There is no length requirement for this activity. Your logs may be hand written, but please use clear handwriting.

Individual Tour Reflections:
After you shadow each tour, take time to write down your thoughts using the template found in this packet. What went well? What would you have done differently? What surprised you? Please hand in these reflections throughout the quarter soon after each shadowed tour. There is no length requirement for this assignment. You may turn in handwritten copies of these reflections, but please use clear handwriting. Remember to keep a copy of each reflection for your files. They will help you with your final paper due on Nov. 16.

Audience Strategy Paper (Due Nov. 9):
In this assignment, we ask you to imagine that you must give an hour long tour to a group visiting the Wexner Center. You may choose the age of your group. Using what you’ve learned during the quarter about working with various audiences, plan your tour! How will you begin your tour? What works of art will you choose? Why? What types of ‘big ideas’ do you want your visitors to think about at each stop—are those ideas appropriate for your audience? What questions might you ask to make the tour interactive? How might you conclude the tour? Etc. This paper should be approx. 4 pages long and must be typed.

Tour shadowing experience paper (Due Nov. 16):
Let your individual tour reflections jog your memory as you reflect on the entire quarter and think about what you learned as you observed the active docents giving tours. This paper should sum up your thoughts about touring in general: What did you learn? What, in your opinion, is good touring practice? What types of things should be avoided? How, if at all, did your perceptions change over the quarter? What types of techniques do you plan on using when you begin touring? Etc. This paper should be approx. 3 pages and must be typed.
Final Presentations (Nov. 30):
As a culmination of all that you’ve learned about teaching in the galleries this fall, we ask that you prepare a brief presentation that centers around a piece on display in Wexner Center’s galleries. Your work on your Audience Strategy Paper may inform your presentation.

Here are some things to think about when preparing your presentations:

- Each presentation should be brief—we’ll say that 7 minutes is the magic number. Each individual will be asked to stop their presentation at the 7 minute mark, so plan ahead!

- Think of this presentation as a stop on a tour. Remember—this isn’t going to be an exam to determine how much in depth research you’ve done on the artist or particular work of art (although knowing the context of a piece is logical and expected and will help you to form discussion ideas and questions.)

- These presentations should be interactive with a specific audience in mind. As your audience, we will need to know what kind of perspective to take in order to ask you appropriate questions. It will be the responsibility of the audience to ask age appropriate questions. Don’t forget to tell us how old we are before you begin your presentation.

- Have topics and questions prepared, but be flexible! If the discussion about the piece veers away from where you expected, don’t get flustered or irritated—just go with it! Some of the best discussions are directed by the group. Do feel that you can rein things in if someone gets completely off topic, however.

What will we be looking for?
Are your questions and your vocabulary age appropriate?
Is any factual information that you present accurate?
Are you using good communication skills when addressing the group? (Volume, eye contact, etc.)
Are you engaging the group rather than lecturing the group?
Are you going somewhere with your questions? What’s your ‘big idea’?
Are you using some of the tools and tips that have been offered to you this fall?

Let us know if you have any questions about any of these assignments!
Looking Log #1: Give it time

Let your brain find meaning as your eyes roam

Find a work of art that you have either never seen before or have never taken the time to really ‘see’ before. Don’t look at extended wall text yet! Take a seat at a comfortable distance from the piece and mentally prepare yourself to spend at least 3-5 minutes looking at this one work of art. During your reflection, write down the observations that pop into your head. You do not have to use completes sentences and you may sketch if it will help you to record your thoughts.

Helpful hints:

- Let your eyes work for you. Your brain will automatically work to translate familiar images into experiential knowledge. Let your eyes roam so your brain can create meaning.

- Let questions emerge. Don’t make assumptions and rest on them. If you don’t have an immediate answer, write it down and come back to it. It’s possible that you may not find the answer you’re looking for.

- Let what you already know inform your looking. Recognize that you might not know everything.

- Make a note of interesting details that you can return to later.

- Look away for a few seconds if the flow of thought starts to stagnate

- It’s ok to revisit or resee details. You might see them in a new light.

There is no completely right or wrong way to reflect upon art. These are hints that may help you in this process, but they are not intended to be the definitive steps that you must take during this activity.

The format and procession of this looking log activity are from The Intelligent Eye, by David Perkins.
Looking Log #2: Broaden

Using the same work of art that you looked at in Looking Log #1, encourage your brain to find meaning as your eyes roam. As we begin to broaden our way of looking at the work, we begin to discover messages that the artist has left for us. This is information that is awaiting our discovery.

Helpful Hints:

- Ask yourself: What’s going on here?
- Look for surprises.
- Look for mood or personality in the work.
- Look for symbolism or meaning. What’s the piece trying to say to you?
- Look for motion.
- Look for time or place.
- Look for cultural connections.

There is no completely right or wrong way to reflect upon art. These are hints that may help you in this process, but they are not intended to be the definitive steps that you must take during this activity.
Looking Log #3: Deepen

Using the same piece of art as in the first two looking logs, deliberately look for deeper meaning. Seek out puzzles or mysteries in the work and explore methods that could reveal the answers to you.

Helpful Hints:

- Why did the artist do that?
- How did the artist get that effect?
- How does that element relate to or affect the rest of the work?
- How would the work be different if __________ were different?
- How does the line, color, composition, etc. affect my thinking about the work?

There is no completely right or wrong way to reflect upon art. These are hints that may help you in this process, but they are not intended to be the definitive steps that you must take during this activity.
Shadowed Tour Reflection

Name: ___________________________ Shadowed tour # ______

Date of tour: _________________________

Observed Docent: _______________________

Age of Observed Group: _______________________

What are some of your thoughts about this tour? What seemed to go well? What would you have done differently? What did you learn?
APPENDIX B

WINTER 2008 DOCENT CALENDAR
Winter 2008 Docent Calendar

Friday, February 1, 10am-12pm: Gallery Learning
Please join us to learn about the winter exhibitions! Shelly Casto will address Kerry James Marshall’s Every Beat of My Heart, Bill Horrigan, our Director of Media Arts, will discuss the work of Adi Ness, and Helen Molesworth with provide information about the Solitaire exhibition, which she curated.
These exhibitions do not officially open until February 2nd, so the gates will be down during this session. Please arrive early or on time so the guards can let us all in together. We will meet in the coat-check area. This session will be transcribed.

Friday, February 1, 5-8pm
Exhibition Opening Celebration

Tuesday, February 5, 11am-1pm: Special Guest/Brainstorm Combo!
Join us to brainstorm strategies for working with older students and adults in the galleries. At noon, we will have a special opportunity to discuss Solitaire with guests Mollie Blackburn and Mindi Rhoades. They will lead a discussion with the group titled: Reactions to Sexually Explicit Art: What to Expect and How to Respond.

Mollie Blackburn is an associate professor in the College of Education and Human Ecology and a co-coordinator of the Sexuality Studies program at Ohio State. Her research focuses on LGBTQ youth and combating homophobia in schools.

Mindi Rhoades is a visiting professor in the College of Education and Human Ecology. Her research focuses on art education, visual culture, and gender.

We will meet in the café area

Wednesday, February 6, 2-4pm: Exhibition Discussion—Open Forum
We will use this time to explore the newly opened exhibitions together. We will address any concepts that are still unclear and gain a deeper understanding of the works on display by sharing our ideas and observations as a group. This session is being offered to help accommodate the wide range of schedules represented by the docents. Some of the material covered may duplicate other sessions. We will call for RSVPs for this session. We will meet in the café area

Friday, February 8, 6-8pm: Gallery Learning
Tracie McCambridge will address the winter exhibitions.

We will meet in the coat-check area

Wednesday, February 13, 2-4pm: Brainstorming Session
Strategies for working with young audiences. Young audiences will not be taken into the Solitaire exhibition. This session will focus mainly on the Every Beat of My Heart and Adi Ness exhibitions.
Tuesday, February 26, 4:30pm: Artist Talk
Kerry James Marshall
FREE in Film/Video Theatre

Thursday, March 13, 10am-12pm: Checkpoint
How are things going? Checkpoint sessions provide an open forum to discuss gallery, touring, and general docenting topics. 
We will meet in the café.

Tuesday, March 25, 7pm: Artist Talk
Adi Nes
FREE in Film/Video Theatre

Wednesday, April 2, 4:30pm: Artist Conversation
Conversation with Sylvia Plimack Mangold and Joan Semmel moderated by Helen Molesworth
FREE in Film/Video Theatre

Tuesday, April 8, 7pm: Lambert Family Lecture
Robert Storr, Dean of Yale School of Art and director of the 2007 Venice Biennale
FREE in Film/Video Theatre
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION
APPROVAL LETTERS
TITLE PAGE - APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION
FROM REVIEW BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
The Ohio State University, Columbus OH 43210

REC'D JAN 25 2008
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2008-0075

Principal Investigator
Name: Margaret J. Wynn
University Title: Professor
Department: Department of Art Education
School of Public Policy
Campus Address (room, building, street address):
1078 Graphic Hall, 26 Koch-Osta Mall
Phone: 614-292-4547
Email: wyonn@OHIO.EDU
Fax: 614-292-4401
Signature: /s/Margaret J. Wynn

Co-investigator
Name: Erin House
University Title: Faculty
Department: Art Education
Mailing Address:
50 W. Lakeview Ave
Columbus, OH 43210
Phone: 614-292-3020
Email: ehuysey@ohio.edu
Signature: /s/Erin House

Proposal Title
Wexner Center for the Arts: Doctoral Study

Source of Funding:

For Office Use Only
Approved: 
Date of determination: 3/07/08
Signature: /s/Steven A. Schaffert

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TITLE PAGE - APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION
FROM REVIEW BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
The Ohio State University, Columbus OH 43210

Principal Investigator
Name: Margaret J. Wyszomirski
Phone: 614-292-5757
University Title: X Professor
Department or College: Department of Art Education and School of Public Policy
E-mail: wyszomirski.1@osu.edu
Campus Address (room, building, street address):
Room #258C Hopkins Hall
128 North Oval Mall
Signature: Wyszomirski
Date: 5/1/08

Co-Investigator
Name: Erin Hoppe
Phone: 614-915-3620
University Status: X Graduate Student
Department or College: Department of Art Education and School of Public Policy
E-mail: hoppe.19@osu.edu
Campus Address (room, building, street address) or Mailing Address:
210 W. Lakesview Ave.
Columbus, OH 43202
Signature: 5/1/08
Date: 5/1/08
Fax: n/a

Protocol Title
Wexner Center for the Arts Docent Study

Source of Funding

For Office Use Only
X Approved. Research has been determined to be exempt under these categories:
#2

☐ Disapproved. The proposed research does not fall within the categories of exemption. Submit an application to the appropriate Institutional Review Board for review.

Date of determination: 5/09/08
Signature: Janet A. Schulte
Office of Responsible Research Practices

RECD MAY 0 8 2008
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2008E0365

Page 2

Approved by the Policy Coordinating IRB, 5/18/08, revised 09/29/06
Consent for Participation in Research

I consent to participating in research for the **Wexner Center for the Arts Docent Study**.

This thesis project will explore the role of student docents at the Wexner Center for the Arts. The project will explore motivations for implementing and participating in the program and the benefits received by those involved. Additionally, the project will look at the challenges and requirements of program implementation as well as volunteerism and participation in arts organizations among younger generations.

I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. No direct benefits will be received for my participation but that the project’s findings and analysis may lead to suggestions for improvements to the docent program.

I consent to the use of a tape recorder during this interview in order to maintain accuracy during data collection and analysis. Initials:  
Yes ________________
No ________________

Information provided during this interview will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be given to all of the participants. No answers will place me at risk for legal liability, or be damaging to my finances, employment, or reputation.

Furthermore, I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

I certify that I am age 18 (eighteen) or older.

I agree to participate in this research study. If requested, a copy of this consent form will be provided to me.

Signed: ___________________________  Signed: ___________________________
(Co-Investigator)  (Participant)

Date: ___________________________  Date: ___________________________
APPENDIX E

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH – STAFF
I consent to participating in research for the **Wexner Center for the Arts Docent Study**, II.

This thesis project will explore the role of student docents at the Wexner Center for the Arts. The project will explore motivations for implementing and participating in the program and the benefits received by those involved. Additionally, the project will look at the challenges and requirements of program implementation as well as volunteerism and participation in arts organizations among younger generations.

I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. No direct benefits will be received for my participation but that the project’s findings and analysis may lead to suggestions for improvements to the docent program.

I consent to the use of a tape recorder during this interview in order to maintain accuracy during data collection and analysis. Initials: Yes ____________

No ____________

As a staff member of the Wexner Center for the Arts, my name is publically available on the Wexner Center website and in publications. I consent to being identified in this study and attributing my name to comments made during this interview and throughout the research process. References to me that are included in the final report will not place me at risk for legal liability, or be damaging to my finances, employment, or reputation. Initials: Yes ____________

No ____________

Furthermore, I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

I certify that I am age 18 (eighteen) or older.

I agree to participate in this research study. If requested, a copy of this consent form will be provided to me.

Signed: ____________________________  Signed: ____________________________ 

*(Co-Investigator)  (Participant)*

Date: ____________________________  Date: ____________________________
APPENDIX F

NEW DOCENT TRAINING COURSE, WINTER 2008 SYLLABUS
New Docent Training Course  
Wexner Center for the Arts  
693X--02297-3  
2 Credit Hours  
Winter Quarter 2008

This independent study course is the final step in the training process to become an active docent at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Students will be matched with more experienced docents to practice and refine their gallery teaching skills. As the final evaluation of students’ progress during the winter quarter, Wexner Center education staff will observe students in conducting a solo-tour of the galleries. Attendance at all experienced docent training sessions will also be required (morning and evening meeting options will be available). Each student’s advancement into the docent program is entirely at the discretion of the Wexner Center education staff and is not solely based on the physical completion of course assignments and tours.

Contact information  
GAA for Docent and Teacher Programs  
Educator for Docent and Teacher Programs  
Wexner Center room #38

Director of Education  
Wexner Center room #37

Office Hours:  
We are in and out of our offices all day. You are free to stop by anytime (we can’t guarantee that we’ll be here) or contact us to arrange an appointment.

Requirements for Successful Completion of Winter Quarter Course  
- Conduct a minimum of 3 partnered tours with active Wexner Center docents.  
- Complete and hand in a thoughtful reflection on each of the completed partnered tours.  
- Communicate with your partner docent and with Wexner Center staff in an effective and responsible manner

We have a large group of active docents and docents-in-training. We rely on our active and training docents to maintain professional communication standards in order to help us keep the program and schedule organized so that we can focus our efforts on good gallery teaching practices. All docents communicate via e-mail in order to schedule all of their tours (whether observation, partnered, or independent). This means we must be able to rely on docents to 1) maintain an active e-mail account, 2) commit to actively checking this account at least once a week (this also means responding promptly to inquiries), and 3) proactively communicate with us if you suspect you are having e-mail account problems (e.g., not receiving e-mails, messages are bounced back, etc.) to foresee problems in case you have missed important information.
• Attend all required docent professional development sessions.
• Demonstrate your ability to create quality gallery experiences for visitors through your final solo-tour. This tour will be observed by Wexner Center staff.
• Maintain a positive attitude and the ability to communicate and respond to constructive criticism in a productive manner.

In this course, you are expected to demonstrate integrity, be responsive to the welfare of others, foster a positive climate based on trust and mutual responsibility, and exhibit sensitivity to and respect for multiple socio-cultural realities, diversity and difference including, but not limited to, sexual identity, ability, class, race, gender, ethnicity, and age. This includes using suitable language, mannerisms and interpersonal skills.

Winter requirement weight:
The Winter Quarter of the docent training process is graded Pass/Fail. You will not receive a letter grade.

Academic Misconduct:
Ohio State professors are expected to report suspected cases of academic misconduct to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. (Find the university’s rules on academic misconduct here: http://acs.ohio-state.edu/offices/oaa/procedures.1.0.html.) The most common form of misconduct is plagiarism. Remember that any time you use the ideas or the statements of someone else, you must acknowledge that source in a citation. This includes material you have found on the web. The university provides guidelines for research on the web at http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor.

Students with Special Needs/Disabilities: If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact us to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs, and explore potential accommodations. We rely on the Office of Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services (292-3307), we encourage you to do so.
**Winter Quarter Partnered Tours**
During the Winter Quarter of the New Docent Training Course, you will tour with active docents and prepare and present a public tour for evaluation by Wexner Center staff. Below you will find guidelines that detail our expectations for the successful completion of this phase toward becoming an active Wexner Center docent.

**Process:**
Similar to the shadowing process of the Autumn Quarter, the partnering process is outlined below:

- You will be e-mailed a list of upcoming tours. We ask that you contact us to let us know what group you wish to tour. You will be required to co-tour at least 3 groups before leading your own tour to be evaluated by Wexner Center education staff.

- Once we receive information from you telling us which group you would like to co-tour, we will place you with a docent.

- It is your responsibility to contact the docent at least a week before your scheduled tour to plan the format of the tour. We will provide you with contact information. The two of you will work together to design the tour and decide who will lead each portion of the tour.

- The day of your tour, you must arrive at least 30 minutes before the group is scheduled to arrive. It is your responsibility to check with your co-touring docent to see if he or she would like to meet earlier than 30 minutes before the group is scheduled to arrive.

- After the conclusion of your tour, your mentor docent will submit his or her thoughts about your performance to a member of the education department. If it is felt necessary, you may be required to co-tour more than 3 groups before leading your own tour to be evaluated by Wexner Center education staff. You may co-tour more than 3 groups if you personally feel it necessary.

- Just as with shadowed tours, you will be asked to submit a reflection of your partnered tour.

- The Wexner Center education staff will inform you whether or not you will be invited to continue as a docent after your evaluated self-led tour.
**Partnered Tour Reflections:**
After each tour, take time to write down your thoughts using the template found in this document. What went well? What would you have done differently? What surprised you? Please hand in these reflections throughout the quarter soon after each tour. You may turn in hand written copies of these reflections, but please use clear handwriting. Remember to keep a copy of each reflection for your files. Please use complete sentences.

**Development Sessions:**
You will be e-mailed a schedule of all of the Winter Development sessions that we plan for our docents. We ask that you attend as many of these sessions as your schedule will allow. Attendance to an Exhibition Learning session is mandatory. Absence from an Exhibition Learning session can not be made up.
Co-Tour Reflection

Name: __________________________  Co-tour # _______

Date of tour: ______________________

Partner Docent: ______________________

Group Name: _______________________ Age/Grade of Group: _______

What are some of your thoughts about this tour? What seemed to go well? What would you have done differently? What did you learn?
APPENDIX G

SCHEDULE OF PARTICIPATION IN DOCENT ACTIVITIES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September 2007</th>
<th>October 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 – Interview</td>
<td>5 – Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – Class</td>
<td>12 – Class, Docent Shadow Tour #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 – Class</td>
<td>16 – Docent Shadow Tour #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – Class</td>
<td>19 – Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – Docent Shadow Tour #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 – Docent Shadow Tour #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 – Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 – Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 – Student-Only Discussion with Spike Lee</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 – Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 – Docent Shadow Tour #4</td>
<td>5 – Gallery Learning Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Class</td>
<td>11 – Student-Only Discussion with Spike Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – Docent Shadow Tour #5</td>
<td>26 – Kerry James Marshall Artist Talk</td>
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<td>9 – Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 – Docent Shadow Tour #6</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 – Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 – Class &amp; Tour Stop</td>
<td>4 – Co-tour #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Co-tour #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 – Co-tour #1</td>
<td>5 – Gallery Learning Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 – Checkpoint session</td>
<td>11 – Student-Only Discussion with Spike Lee</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 – Artist Conversation with Sylvia Plimack Mangold and Joan Semmel</td>
<td>26 – Kerry James Marshall Artist Talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 – Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – Student docent check-in</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 – Gallery learning sessions with artists Jeff Smith, Jane Hammond, and Mary Heilmann</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 – Gallery Learning Sessions with artists Jeff Smith, Jane Hammond, and Mary Heilmann</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 – Co-tour #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>June 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 – Student docent check-in</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 – Gallery learning sessions with artists Jeff Smith, Jane Hammond, and Mary Heilmann</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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REFERENCES


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**Interviews**


