

Editor's Note:

The following two articles represent an attempt to explore one aspect of how people perceive visitor facilities. The problem addressed in these articles is the meaning or connotation of names like "museum," "historic site," and "state park." It was hypothesized that the title of a facility communicates meaning to visitors or potential visitors. People have specific expectations of what they will find and experience based on the name. "Museum," "historic site," and "state park" each have their own connotation. Further, the same facility may be perceived differently depending upon its name.

Perhaps the most important implication of these results is for established facilities who are contemplating a name change or for new facilities who are attempting to select a name. The staff would be wise to decide what features/programs at the facility are most important; trial test various names; and select the name that communicates most accurately what will be found at the facility. The results may also be important to museums/parks/zoos/exhibition centers concerned about what perceptions are connoted by their facility's name. The name may create faulty expectations for visitors (or potential visitors) and influence whether or not people visit and whether or not visitors are disappointed with their experience while visiting.

The Connotations of Facility Names

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People visit or don't visit museums and other types of facilities for at least two reasons. First, they may visit because they know the facility offers an experience consistent with their leisure values (Hood, 1983). Conversely, they may avoid visiting because they know from past experience that their leisure values are inconsistent with that particular facility. Hood found that frequent visitors to art museums placed high value on three leisure goals: having an opportunity to learn, having a challenge of new experiences, and doing something worthwhile in leisure time. Nonvisitors, on the other hand, valued social interaction, participating actively, and feeling comfortable and at ease in their surroundings.

A second reason for visitation or nonvisitation may be that visitors have inaccurate perceptions of what they will find at a visitor facility. For example, if people who enjoy viewing exhibits do not expect exhibits at a historic site or state park, they may be less likely to visit these facilities. Thus, it might be hypothesized that the public image of a visitor facility influences visitation and that if this public image is inaccurate it results in lower visitation because people expect a less rewarding experience. Consistent with this notion, we have found that in several of our visitor projects, many people who would not ordinarily visit, but who were pressured by family/friends to visit, were surprised to find that a museum is more exciting and fun than they expected.

Bitgood and Thompson (1987) found that facilities with a traditionally high visitation, such as theme parks and zoos, were perceived in a more positive light than facilities with lower visitation (art museums and science museums). Bitgood and Bishop (1991) found that perceptions of a particular museum were related to the experience of a current visit, the gender of the respondent, and prior visits at that museum.

This study examined two aspects of the public image of visitor facilities: the expectations of what is likely to be found at different types of facilities; and, some general perceptions of these different types of visitor facilities. A two-part survey was conducted to accomplish this task. In the first part, respondents judged how likely objects/events/activities might be found in each of six types of facilities (art museums, historic sites, history museums, natural history museums, science museums, and state parks). It was hypothesized that each of these facility types has a different public image and that this image is often inaccurate. In the second part of the survey, respondents were asked to rate each type of facility in terms of six descriptive adjectives in order to assess how the visitor facilities are perceived in terms of interest, excitement, fun, difficulty, meaningfulness, and educational value.

Method

The respondents in this survey were 89 graduate and undergraduate students from Jacksonville State University. Age range was 19-49 years. The survey included the following instructions:

"For each type of facility (museum, park, historic site) in the table below indicate the probability of each of the activities, events and services you might expect at the facility. For example, if you expect that every science museum contains exhibits, you would write 100% in the cell at the top left corner. If you expected no exhibits at all, you would place 0% in that cell."

Facilities included science museum, history museum, historic site, state park, natural history museum, and art museum. Activities/events/services included exhibits, guided tours, unguided tours, audio-visual presentations, gift shops,

picnicking, snack bar/restaurant, publications, demonstrations, and monuments. In the second part of the survey, respondents were asked to rate each type of facility on six bipolar adjective pairs (interesting-uninteresting, exciting-unexciting, fun-boring, easy-difficult, meaningful-meaningless, educational-uneducational).

Respondents were also asked to list any museums, parks, and/or historic sites they had visited in the last two years.

Data from this study were entered into a Macintosh computer and analyzed with the *Stat View* software package (Brainpower, 1986). Expectancy scores were subjected to a mixed design Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with gender between subjects, and type of facility and object/event/activity within subjects. A second ANOVA examined gender between subjects, and type of facility and museum descriptors (interest, excitement, etc.) within subjects. Since gender was not statistically significant in any of these comparisons, the gender differences will not be discussed.

Results

Respondent expectations

Table 1 shows the mean expectancy rates of finding various objects/events/activities at each type of visitor facility. The expectancy rate is simply the average (mean) rating of how likely the objects/events/activities would be found at a facility. The expectancy rates are divided into four ranges: very high (>70% expectancy); high (50-70%); medium (30-50%); and low (<30%).

One way to examine this data is to compare the various facilities in terms of which objects/events/activities fall under the four expectancy ranges. Each facility appears to have a distinct image as indicated by the relative expectations of various objects/events/activities. Art museums had "very high" expectancy rates for exhibits, publications, and guided tours while picnicking had a "low" expectancy. Historic sites had a "very high" expectancy for monuments and a "low" expectancy for demonstrations and audiovisual presentations. History museums had a "very high" expectation for exhibits, publications, gift shops, and monuments, but no object/event/activity fell into the "low" expectancy range. Natural history museums had a "very high" expectancy rate for guided tours, exhibits, and publications with no item falling into the "low" expectancy range. For science museums the expectancy rate was "very high" for exhibits, publications, demonstrations, and audiovisual presentations and "low" for picnicking. Finally, state park expectancy rates were "very high" for picnicking, food, and unguided tours and "low" for guided tours, demonstrations, and audiovisual presentations.

The overall average expectancy rates for visitor facilities probably reflects the range of experiences expected and may be considered a measure of perceived variety of visitor experiences. The highest overall averages were found for natural history museums (62.7), science museums (62.7), and

Table 1
Expected Likelihood of Objects/Events/Activities

Range: Very High (>70% expected)

Art Museums Exhibits (100.0) Publications (78.4) Guided Tours (70.3)	Historic Sites Monuments (91.3)
History Museums Exhibits (93.2) Publications (85.5) Gift Shop (80.5) Monuments (75.7)	Natural History Museums Guided Tours (95.4) Exhibits (94.5) Publications (79.9)
Science Museums Exhibits (96.7) Publications (79.9) Demonstrations (72.0) Audiovisuals (71.9)	State Parks Picnicking (96.7) Food (79.9) Unguided Tours (73.7)

Range: High (50-70% expected)

Art Museums Monuments (66.7) Unguided Tours (56.9) Gift Shops (55.9)	Historic Sites Picnicking (68.2) Unguided Tours (64.5) Publications (60.3) Exhibits (54.8)
History Museums Guided Tours (68.2) Audiovisuals (63.4) Unguided Tours (54.4)	Natural History Museums Monuments (61.7) Gift Shops (61.6) Audiovisuals (59.4) Unguided Tours (55.0)
Science Museums Guided Tours (68.6) Gift Shops (67.0) Unguided Tours (54.4) Monuments (53.1)	State Parks Monuments (65.4) Gift Shops (64.0) Publications (56.4)

Range: Medium Expectancy (30-50%)

Art Museums Audiovisuals (46.3) Food (33.0) Demonstrations (31.6)	Historic Sites Food (40.8)
History Museums Food (37.5) Demonstrations (35.8) Picnicking (34.6)	Natural History Museums Picnicking (44.8) Food (41.4) Demonstrations (37.9)
Science Museums Food (37.6)	State Parks Exhibits (33.9)

Range: Low Expectancy (<30%)

Art Museums Picnicking (28.4)	Historic Sites Demonstrations (26.4) Audiovisuals (18.9)
History Museums	Natural History Museums
Science Museums Picnicking (29.9)	State Parks Guided Tours (24.4) Demonstrations (17.0) Audiovisuals (9.5)

history museums (62.7). The lowest overall average expectancies were found for historic sites (52.6) and state parks (51.8). This difference was statistically significant [$F(5,375) = 7.456$; $p = .0001$] suggesting that respondents did not expect as rich a variety of experiences at historic sites and state parks as they might expect at museums.

Another way to look at this data is to examine the expectancy rates by objects/events/activities. The following summary provides such an analysis.

Exhibits. Except for state parks, exhibits were given "very high" or "high" expectancies at all facilities. In particular, museums of all types were given "very high" expectancies with respect to exhibits. All four types of museums had expectancies of more than 90% for exhibits. The expectancy rates of exhibits in historic sites and state parks, however, was lower, 54.8% for historic sites and 33.9% for state parks. The expected difference for exhibits among these facilities was statistically significant [$F(5,375) = 29.67$; $p = .0001$].

Guided tours. Natural history museums had the highest expectation for guided tours (95.4%) and expectancies for other types of museums ranged close to 70%. The expectancy for historic sites was 52.6% and for state parks, 24.4%. The expectancy difference among facilities for guided tours was also significant [$F(5,370) = 4.523$; $p = .0005$].

Unguided tours. All facilities were given expectancy ratings of 50% or better, with state parks given the highest (73.7%). Although there was a narrower range of expectancies among facilities for this type of event, the difference among facilities was nevertheless significant [$F(5,370) = 7.021$; $p = .0001$].

Audiovisual (AV) presentations. AV presentations were most strongly associated with science (71.9%), history (63.4%), and natural history museums (59.4%). The expectancy for art museums was 46.3%, historic sites had an expectancy rate of only 18.9%, and state parks only 9.5%. [$F(5,370) = 86.547$; $p = .0001$].

Gift shop. All facilities received expectancies of over 50% with history museums (80.5%) the highest. Historic sites was the lowest at 52.5%. [$F(5,375) = 2.92$; $p = .0134$].

Picnicking facilities. As expected, state parks had the highest expectancy rating (96.7%), historic sites second (68.2%), and the expectancies for museums were all below 50%. [$F(5,375) = 42.922$; $p = .0001$].

Snack bar/restaurant. State parks received an expectancy rate of almost 80% for this item, while the expectancies for the other facilities ranged between 33-41.4%. [$F(5,370) = 8.744$; $p = .0001$].

Publications. The expectancy for publications was always very high or high. Respondents had a higher expectancy for publications in museums than in historic sites and state parks. The expectancy rates for museums ranged between 78.4 and 85.5%; historic sites, 60.3%, and state parks, 56.4%. [$F(5,365) = 21.122$; $p = .0001$].

Demonstrations. Except for science museums, the expectancy rate for demonstrations was either moderate or

low. Science museums received the highest expectancy rating (72.0%) with other museums between 30-40%. Historic sites (26.4%) and state parks (17.0%) were lowest. [$F(5,375) = 43.048$; $p = .0001$].

Monuments. Historic sites received the highest expectancy (91.3%) with the other facilities ranging between 53.1 and 75.7%. [$F(5,375) = 4.994$; $p = .0002$].

Bipolar Adjective Ratings

The mean ratings of each type of facility in terms of the six bipolar adjectives are shown in Table 2.

Interesting-uninteresting. There was no statistically significant difference among the ratings of facilities for this descriptor. [$F(5,355) = 1.688$; $p = .1366$].

Exciting-unexciting. State parks were rated the most exciting (mean = 2.3), science (3.4) and art museums (3.2), the least exciting. Historic sites (2.9) were rated similar to history museums (2.9) and natural history museums (2.7). [$F(5,350) = 6.053$; $p = .0001$].

Fun-boring. State parks (1.8) were rated most "fun" with natural history (2.8) and historic sites (3.0) next. Science (3.1) and art (3.3) museums were rated least "fun." [$F(5,350) = 10.342$; $p = .0001$].

Easy-difficult. State parks (1.5) were rated most "easy," and science museums (3.8) least "easy" of the facilities. Historic sites (2.4) were rated "easier" than museums. History museums (2.8), natural history museums (2.8), and art museums (2.9) were rated in between. [$F(5,350) = 33.83$; $p = .0001$].

Meaningful-meaningless. History (1.7), natural history (1.8), and science (1.9) museums were rated most "meaningful"; state parks (2.8) and art museums (2.4), least "meaningful." Historic sites (1.9) were rated more similar to science museums than to art museums or state parks. [$F(5,350) = 13.113$; $p = .0001$].

Educational-uneducational. Science (1.2), history (1.2), and natural history (1.3) museums were rated most "educational." Historic sites (1.5) a little less "educational," art museums (2.2) next, and state parks (3.4) least "educational." [$F(5,350) = 61.104$; $p = .0001$].

Discussion

The results of this study indicated that respondents perceived each facility in a different way in terms of expected experiences and five of six of the perceptual descriptors (excitement, fun, etc.). These visitor perceptions differed in terms of the order of relative expectancies and the overall expectancy rates. Some features (e.g., exhibits) have a higher expectancy in museums than in historic sites and parks while other features (e.g., picnicking) have a higher expectancy in state parks and historic sites. Respondents reported higher overall expectancies for the three types of museums than for state parks and historic sites suggesting the perception of more limited opportunities at these latter facilities.

How accurate are these perceptions of facilities? Table 3 shows the actual percentage of each of the objects/events/activities for the North Carolina State Historic Sites (Beck, 1990) and the Arkansas State Parks (Miller, 1990). In parentheses is the predicted or expected value from the current research. It is clear that, at least with respect to the North Carolina and Arkansas state systems, visitors overpredicted or underpredicted several items. For the N. C. State Historic Sites, respondents tended to overpredict "restaurant/snack bar" and underpredict "exhibits," "audiovisual presentations," "guided tours," "demonstrations," "gift shop," and "picnicking." For Arkansas State Parks respondents overpredicted "unguided tours," "restaurant/snack bar," and "monuments" (The concept of "monument" was not defined.); and underpredicted "exhibits," "guided tours," "demonstrations," "publications," and "gift shop."

Visitor facilities were also perceived differently in terms of bipolar adjective descriptors. For example, state parks were rated as the most "fun" of the six facilities, but the least "educational." These adjective descriptors were not strongly related to the expectancy ratings of exhibits, tours, publications, demonstrations, etc.

One difficulty with this study was that definitions of the objects/events/activities were not provided to respondents. Thus, respondents had to make their own interpretations. For example, "monuments" could be interpreted as a historical plaque, a stone structure, a memorial stone, or a building erected in remembrance of a person or event. We do not know if respondents gave this concept the same interpretation.

Another difficulty with interpreting the results of this study was that the sample of respondents were a group of university students from the state of Alabama. Data from other populations (age ranges, educational backgrounds, and geographical locations) is necessary in order to draw conclusions about the generality of results.

References

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Table 2

Mean Ratings of Facility Types
(Lower numbers indicate closer attitude toward the descriptor)

	Inter- esting	Excit- ing	Fun	Easy	Mean- ingful	Edu- cational
Science Museum	2.4	3.4	3.1	3.8	1.9	1.2
History Museum	2.0	2.9	3.1	2.8	1.7	1.2
Historic Site	2.0	2.9	3.0	2.4	1.9	1.5
State Park	2.2	2.3	1.8	1.5	2.8	3.4
Natural History	2.4	2.7	2.8	2.8	1.8	1.3
Art Museum	2.4	3.2	3.3	2.9	2.4	2.2

Table 3

Actual Objects/Events/Activities at State Facilities

	N. C. Historic Sites (Total=24) Actual (predicted)	Arkansas State Parks (Total=45) Actual (predicted)
Exhibits	95.8% (54.8)	48.9% (33.9)
Audiovisual presentations	79.2% (18.9)	13.6% (9.5)
Guided tours	95.8% (52.6)	40.0% (24.4)
Unguided tours	75.0% (64.5)	46.7% (73.3)
Demonstrations	79.2% (26.4)	60.0% (17.0)
Publications	100.0% (60.3)	100.0% (56.4)
Gift Shop	91.7% (52.5)	73.3% (64.0)
Picnicking	91.7% (68.2)	100.0% (96.7)
Food	0% (40.8)	22.2% (79.9)
Monuments	100.0% (91.3)	31.1% (65.4)