

Science Communication: A Practical Guide

Fall Semester, 2011
A CI-H Course

Exhibiting Science: An Introduction

- About museums
- About exhibitions
- The MIT Museum
- Science & technology in museums
- *Rivers of Ice*
- Final project options
- Assignment for Wednesday

Question

How many of you ever visited a museum of science and technology as kids?

...and what are your strongest memories of those visits?

What is a Museum?

- A place
- A collection
- A 'wonder-room' (*Wunderkammer*)
- An interactive playground
- An *experience*

What is an Exhibition?

- A display
 - Objects
 - Images
 - Text
 - Interactive exhibits
 - Multi-media
- *An experience*

The MIT Museum

- Created in the late-1970s
- Mission
 - *“Making research & innovation accessible to all”*
- C. 100,000 visitors per annum
 - *Diverse*: 80% not MIT-connected; 30% families with children; 29% non-white
 - *From far and wide*: 70% from outside Boston region; 30% international
 - *Mainly new*: 80% first-time visitors

Obvious features of MIT Museum

- Showcases MIT research & innovation
- Emphasizes past *and* present
- Newer exhibitions
 - “Sampling MIT” (2009-)
 - *MIT 150 Exhibition* (2011)
 - *Rivers of Ice* (2012)

Science & technology in museums

- Origins of science & technology museums
- The 'science center' revolution
 - or, why does nobody want museums any more?
- Tension between nature of museum and nature of science & technology
 - '(the scientists).. have the future in their bones'...C
P Snow

'Finished' and 'unfinished' science

Finished

- story complete
- unchanging
- significance clear
- knowledge
- certainty
- agreement

Unfinished

- story incomplete
- changing
- significance unclear
- ignorance
- uncertainty
- disagreement

Presenting 'unfinished' science

Unfinished

- story incomplete
- changing
- significance unclear
- ignorance
- uncertainty
- disagreement

Challenge for museum

- what's the story?
- tracking the story?
- how to tell the story?
- partiality
- doubt
- controversy

Conclusions

- *Developing a museum of research and innovation means re-defining what a museum is and how it works*
- *Key issues*
 - Moving from product to process
 - Moving from past to present (& future)
 - Moving from large, 'permanent' exhibitions to smaller, more flexible and more easily updatable displays

Final Practical Project

- Exhibition-based
 - Options around *Rivers of Ice*
- Writing-based
 - a policy memorandum for White House Science Adviser, John Holdren (4-5 pages)
 - an Op-Ed + 5-minute speech (700 words)
 - A science/technology feature article (1100-1500 words)

Rivers of Ice-related project options

- an exhibit on a key idea/issue
 - MIT “Integrated Global System Model”
 - Prof Prinn’s “Greenhouse Gamble”
- an iPad “ghost of the past” hand-held gallery guide
- A program to be delivered alongside/within exhibition
- A series of “provocative facts/questions” for display around MIT Museum
- A window display on Mass Ave

Assignment for Wednesday

- Please tour the public galleries on display in the lobbies of the Broad Institute and the Koch Institute, which face one another across Main Street on the MIT campus. Then write brief notes (2-3 pages) that critically compare and contrast the approaches to exhibiting science of these two galleries.
- In class, we will be joined by Bang Wong (Broad) and Alex Fiorentino (Koch), who have (separate) responsibility for these displays.

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