

## **ARLIS/NA Lunchtime Chat: *Enriching the Museum Visitor Experience: Two Popular Library Outreach Programs***

**Monday, February 4th, 2013**

### **Guests:**

**Sheila Cork, Librarian, New Orleans Museum of Art**

**Leah High, Public Services Librarian, Metropolitan Museum of Art**

### *Transcript:*

**Heather Koopmans:** I see that the time's 2pm, so we'll go ahead and get started.

**Heather Koopmans:** Welcome to today's lunchtime chat, "Enriching the Museum Visitor Experience: Two Popular Library Outreach Programs"

**Heather Koopmans:** Glad to see everyone here! I'm Heather Koopmans, I'll be your moderator today.

**Heather Koopmans:** For those just joining us, you can change your nickname by typing in /nick yourname

**Heather Koopmans:** ... That way we know who you are.

**Heather Koopmans:** We will start with a brief introduction from each of our guests, Sheila Cork and Leah High, and then move on to Q+A and discussion. So please hold your questions at the moment, we'll get to them soon!

**Heather Koopmans:** Sheila Cork is Librarian at the New Orleans Museum of Art and will discuss a book club she has developed for museum guests there.

**Heather Koopmans:** And Leah High is Public Services Librarian at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Leah co-manages storytelling programs for young visitors at the Met's Nolen Library.

**Heather Koopmans:** Sheila, why don't you start off by telling us a little more about your program.

**SheilaCork:** Hi Everyone, The New Orleans Museum of Art's library (the Felix J. Dreyfous Library) was underutilized. Very few people walked through the door or telephoned with questions.

**SheilaCork:** Museum docents, volunteers and support staff did not use the library at all. The curatorial staff would use the library only if absolutely necessary. Museum members and members of the public did not know that the library existed. There were only 224 visits in the partial year 2005.

**SheilaCork:** In 2008 I attended a meeting that discussed “Embedded Librarians”, and during the course of that we discussed the idea of programming in special and academic libraries. I realized that it was something that was OK to do in my library.

**SheilaCork:** I come from a public library background, so it was an easy decision to make. It was a lot harder to convince admin. that this was a thing the library should be doing, the perception was that only the education dept. should program.

**SheilaCork:** I met with the different groups who are “stake holders” at NOMA, and offered them a choice of program types (all ones that I thought could be accomplished successfully by the library), they chose “Book Club”.

**SheilaCork:** I asked them for advice about days and hours and that is how we came up with lunchtimes, alternating Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. We always meet at least once a month, sometimes twice if something has come up that relates to what we are reading.

**SheilaCork:** More people use the library now. Docents come in to research; the museum staff and volunteers come in to read the newspaper and journals. The curatorial staff asks me to purchase books, databases, or magazines for them, to do Interlibrary loans, etc. The engineering department has asked for material, and the security department has led one of our book club special programs.

**SheilaCork:** There is still a long way to go but there were 616 visits in 2006 and 1300 visits in 2012, lots more reference questions, and a lot more ILL activity – just a busier place overall.

**SheilaCork:** That's the history. We read books related to art, noma's collections, noma's exhibitions. Book club members send in ideas for reading, and I work them into the advance exhibition schedule.

**SheilaCork:** That way I get a lot of input from the curators about possible programming.

**SheilaCork:** that's it from me.

**Heather Koopmans:** Thanks Sheila!

Heather Koopmans: And next Leah will tell us a little more about her programming at the Met. After Leah we will take Q+A.

**Leah High:** Hello everyone!

**Leah High:** Nolen Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is open to all visitors and hosts a popular storytime program for young children and toddlers.

**Leah High:** Storytime is held Tuesday - Friday from 3:00pm-3:30pm and at 2:00pm on Sundays.

**Leah High:** At these afternoon sessions children age 3-7 (though younger and older visitors are not turned away) hear books based on a monthly theme that relates to the Museum's collections.

**Leah High:** Some examples include, Color, Travel and Journeys, Africa, Art and Artists, etc. Books relating to the theme are pre-selected and set aside for the readers.

**Leah High:** At the end of afternoon Storytime "stroller guides" or "gallery hunts" are provided to the listeners to go independently into the galleries and explore works that relate to the monthly theme.

**Leah High:** Toddler Storytime takes place Tuesday - Friday from 10:30am-11:00am.

**Leah High:** These morning sessions are aimed at children age 18 months-3 years and offer age-appropriate books as well as sing-a-longs and finger play.

**Leah High:** There are no themes used, but popular titles are pre-selected and set aside for readers to choose from, or the reader may select a suitable personal favorite from the collection.

**Leah High:** Our visitors include many "regulars" though many discover the program once they've arrived to the Museum and are seeking family activities.

**Leah High:** Children attend with a variety of parents, grandparents, and caregivers.

**Leah High:** That's the overview!

**Heather Koopmans:** Thanks so much Leah!

**Heather Koopmans:** At this point we'll open the floor to discussion.

**Heather Koopmans:** Does anyone have questions for Leah and Sheila about managing outreach programs? (If your question is for one of them specifically, please say so.)

**Elizabeth Lane:** Sheila: How did you request funding for these programs?

pierce58484: Do you have attendance figures you could share?

**Dan Moore:** Is there any connection between how the information resources in the library are used and how the information resources in the museum are used? In other words, have new information requirements in your libraries affected or caused changes in the informational structure of your museums?

**Marilyn Carbonell:** Sheila, Is the library part of the Education Division? At the Nelson-Atkins, we are part of Education.

**Heather Slania:** Sheila- what other programs had you brought to the stake holders that were dismissed?

**Heather Koopmans:** Hi @pierce, @dan, @Marilyn, @Heather... we'll let Sheila answer the first question, then Sheila and Leah take @pierce's question

**Leah High:** Nolen Library averages around 1000 Storytime visitors per month over the past 6 months.

**SheilaCork:** I run the programs on a shoestring budget. NOMA provides soft drinks and water for the discussion groups. Other meetings off site we car pool to, or if a longer trip we rent a bus that we all pay for.

**anne:** Have either of you dealt with issues of other staff members being territorial? I have posed programming before and have not had problems organizing things related to children because our preK-12 department won't allow anyone else to do any children's programming. If so, how did you handle it?

**Heidi:** Leah: do you involve docents in the toddler storytime? Who leads the sing-a-longs?

**Heather Koopmans:** Hi @anne, @heidi, we'll get to your questions in a moment.

**SheilaCork:** Attendance is about 20 - 25 people at the book discussions, and a little more than that for field trips. Curatorial programs differ, depending on whether or not the docents join us.

**Heather Koopmans:** Sheila, Leah, do you have thoughts on @Dan Moore's question about the library vs. museum?

**SheilaCork:** I made a decision to stay away from children's programming, but that has changed in the last few years. I conceived a program for National Poetry Month that involves students at local high schools composing poetry in response to the art in NOMA's permanent collection.

**SheilaCork:** But, you will have to make friends with the ed. dept.

**pierce58484:** Do people register for children's programs?

**Sarah Osborne Bender:** Leah- do you think that a children's' story time could work in a library that is not designated for a children's' collection, that serves researchers as well? We have the opportunity to take quite a few children's art books donated by our Ed department as they finish with them. I like the idea but worry about the disruption in a shared space.

**Heather Koopmans:** Hi @pierce, @Sarah, we'll get to your questions in a moment.

**Leah High:** Regarding Dan's question, could you please clarify?

**SheilaCork:** No, I don't think so, Dan, but I am working on a way to make the library more visible in the galleries at NOMA. Education and the head of the Arts. dept. are interested in the idea.

**SheilaCork:** The library is part of the Arts dept. I do work with education whenever possible.

**Amelia Nelson:** How do you market these programs, on the museum's website, publications, facebook?

**Leah High:** When Storytime began Nolen Library was a part of the Museum's Education Department and therefore there were no cross-territorial issues. However, a few years ago all the Museum's libraries consolidated and Nolen and Education effectively became different departments. The program does remain a collaboration.

**Marilyn Carbonell:** Childrens' activities in a research library - we care offering Chinese zodiac reading sessions during the entire museum's celebration/ family activities.

**Dan Moore:** You've discussed implementing new programs as a way to better advertise library services and boost library awareness. I was wondering if those new programs have had a ripple effect - because of new programming in the library, there's new programming in the museum. Also, if more tech services are being offered at all, how does that affect the museum's use of technology in delivering information to visitors?

**Leah High:** Heidi,

**Dan Moore:** For instance, with more ILL activity in your library, Sheila, is that having any affect on the type of information resources being offered to visitors in the museum proper?

**Leah High:** Readers for Storytime come from all across the Museum. For example we have readers from Finance, the Registrar, and Curatorial Departments as well as the Libraries and Education staff, and Volunteers (including Docents). It has been a wonderful opportunity for Museum Staff whose work ordinarily keeps them in an office to interface with the public in a rewarding way.

**Heather Koopmans:** Hi Dan, I've got your question marked and we'll get back to it soon.

**SheilaCork:** No, not as such. The library has no automation - although I propose it - so we cannot offer access to our collection from locations other than the library. If there are ripples they are from the museum to the library. Whenever I hear about something new I try to involve the library in it.

**Leah High:** I'm sorry, what question is next?

**Heidi:** Sheila, I'm interested in starting a book club for teachers. Could you name the top three components of a successful book club, from your perspective? For example, do people like pre-reading question guides?

**Heidi:** Thanks Leah. Great concept!

**Leah High:** Storytime does not require registration, but does have a limited capacity.

**Heather Koopmans:** For Leah and Sheila, Since we're talking about other depts. that were involved, have they been pretty open to working with you? Or more territorial as anne asked about?

**Leah High:** The program has become so successful, in fact, that we have had to limit the number of visitors permitted to attend due to safety concerns because of overcrowding.

**SheilaCork:** Let the teachers have a say in what they read. Make up the reading list a year in advance, and have a meeting to plan it. Involve all the other depts. in what you are doing, it makes for a better experience.

**Sarah Osborne Bender:** Sheila- do you have staff members in the book club as well, or only members/public? And how do you advertise the book club events?

**Jessica:** Do either of you have any suggestions for marketing your programs so that they don't get lost in a sea of other museum programs?

**SheilaCork:** I have never felt that other depts. are territorial. They help a lot in our presentations. The education dept. focus mostly on children so there isn't a conflict there

**Leah High:** Storytime is jointly coordinated by several librarians on the staff of Nolen Library and by the educator in charge of Family Programs in the Museum's Education Department. We work together to make strategic decisions, plan logistics, and communicate with various departments about the program. In some instances there are territory issues. It seems that different departments can be focused on specific goals or outcomes that may or may not be a priority for the library.

**Leah High:** However, with good communication, we've been able to work through it.

**Heather Koopmans:** Sarah had a great question for Leah about whether a childrens program could possibly work in a collection that is primarily geared towards researchers. How do you address that?

**SheilaCork:** Sarah and Jessica - I use the museum's constant contact email product, I send info. about our meetings to the local NPR station, I have info. on the library's web page and on the museum

**Dan Moore:** Sheila, has there been a history in your library of hosting library exhibitions that supplement current exhibitions?

**SheilaCork:** 's web page. Our PR person used to tweet and update facebook info. about our special events, but she has left and we don't have anyone doing that at the moment.

**Leah High:** Sarah, that is a great question.

**Leah High:** Nolen Library is structured with both a space for children and a research area.

**Leah High:** However, there is no sound/physical barrier between the two.

**SheilaCork:** Sarah, some staff members attend, some museum volunteers attend.

**Leah High:** The reality is that there is disruption in the shared space, but it is temporary and we've decided , worth it to offer the program.

**Jessica:** Do either of you charge for your programs?

**Heather Koopmans:** re: leah and Sarah, just want to point out that Marilyn had a great suggestion about making the programming family oriented for all ages, which involves children but perhaps is more inclusive. (Zodiac idea)

**Heather Koopmans:** Perhaps Leah and Sheila can address this one -- how do you differentiate your programming from other offerings from the museum?

**SheilaCork:** Dan, the library does not offer exhibitions. No display cases etc. I am finding it a hard fight on that topic.

**Heather Koopmans:** So that the message is not 'lost' as Jessica pointed out.

**Heather Koopmans:** That is, marketing your programs.

**Leah High:** thanks for pointing that out, Heather! Yes- having all age inclusive programming is a great suggestion and the Education dept does offer many "all ages" programs

**Leah High:** Jessica, Storytime is free with museum admission

**SheilaCork:** Events are clearly marketed as NOMA Book Club on the web page and in the email that goes out. sac

**SheilaCork:** Book Club programs are free as well

**Leah High:** The program is listed in the Museum's web calendar and print publications, and we distribute bookmarks with Storytime information in the library. I think it has also been promoted through word of mouth.

**Eric Wolf:** So book club is open to the general public, not just museum members?

**Marilyn Carbonell:** Sheila, does the museum store feature the book club selections?

**SheilaCork:** Yes, we advertise on NPR, so anyone who hears can call for more info. and come along.

**Leah High:** but as far as "getting lost" - it seems to stand out on its own in these venues because its the only program (Toddler Storytime) offered for that young of an audience.

**SheilaCork:** Yes, Marilyn, they have a display area for our books, and books from previous years. They sell very well. They have flyers and contact info. there for the book club.,

**SheilaCork:** Our book club members get a 20% discount on the book club books they buy there.

**Marilyn Carbonell:** Sheila and Leah, What kind of user feedback and assessment for your programs?

**Jessica:** thanks Leah, admission to the museum where I work is free, but the museum requires that we charge non-members a \$5 fee for all programs including the book club (members are free). I'm afraid it is discouraging non-members from attending. Do you have any suggestions for offering perks to members without alienating non-members?

**Leah High:** Though we have not implemented any formal tools of evaluation, we've had anecdotal positive feedback from visitors.

**SheilaCork:** I used to distribute an evaluation form after each program, but no longer do so as I only get generic positive feed back, no comments. Now I distribute a larger survey once a year. I try to incorporate the suggestions, e.g. the Poets for Art program came out of a suggestion for more poetry in the program.

**Eric Wolf:** But it also encourages membership, Jessica--(takes off his development cap).

**SheilaCork:** One of our members boosted their museum membership to a "circle" level because of the book club!

**Leah High:** Jessica, that is a hard one.

**SheilaCork:** Jessica, that's a tough one. Who would be the person in your organization to talk to about rescinding the fee?

**Jessica:** Very true, Eric! We do have members who joined just for the book club. I've just had several young college age people come but leave when they discovered there was a fee. I guess that is just how the cookie crumbles.

**Leah High:** there could also be "donation based" attendance?

**Leah High:** so something is given - even if not the full amount

**SheilaCork:** I base my operations that the book club is enriching the experience of all museum goers, not just members.

**Courtney:** Or, perhaps the book club fee could be waived if the book is purchased at the museum store?

**Jessica:** It is very tough, we go back and forth about the fee issue. I'll take what we discussed here and your suggestions to my next programming meeting. I think the idea of a discount at the book store is great and the donation format. Thank you all for the suggestions!

**pierce58484:** Jessica, is your book club in a library or a museum or in the museum?

**SheilaCork:** Do you have to pay any money for the book club programs that you do?

**Heather Koopmans:** Perhaps that offers an opportunity to partner with local colleges/universities, especially if there are student-specific discounts or incentives? (just a thought)

**Eric Wolf:** It sounds like Jessica's museum, like mine, is free admission. So it is important to give members additional benefits, something I have worked on with our development department with good results for both the library and membership--I raised over \$10,000 for the library with our Friends group last year.

**SheilaCork:** refreshments, copies, use of a room etc

**Jessica:** We meet in the museum, and we do pay for refreshments. I'm lucky to have a very supportive education department so the money comes out of the greater education programming budget

**Alison:** Our book club requires you to be either a museum member or a member of our Library League (friends group). The League membership is much less expensive than museum membership, so we have had people who want to attend go that route instead. We also have free admission to the museum.

**Marilyn Carbonell:** Eric's comment is interesting -- could we have another session on Friends groups in museum libraries?

**Heather Koopmans:** Marilyn, that's a great idea.

**Maura Burns:** Is membership promoted DURING the program... describing all of the fantastic perks of joining as a member?

**Courtney:** I imagine members vs. non-members is tricky. Yes, you want the museum and library to be available to all users, but membership should count for something.

**Jessica:** Great idea, Marilyn!

**Leah High:** great idea indeed

**SheilaCork:** I would like to know how to start one, and how to overcome admin. opposition to it.

**Eric Wolf:** Marilyn (and others) there will be a panel on museum library outreach at the Pasadena conference, I will be speaking on Friends groups, and the Nolen Library at the Met will be represented by Naomi.

<http://arlisna2013.sched.org/event/6e72f1719a1ed579c995e790ffc1e82a#.URALIIXRHCg>

**SheilaCork:** Hi Eric, I won't be able to go to Pasadena, no funds available for travel this year. Will you have your talk posted somewhere?

**Courtney:** My museum has a book club for docents. There is no fee charged or membership required, but it's an award for those for who volunteer time in the museum. Perhaps the book club fee could also be waived for volunteers or docents?

**truman4904:** The Ringling Museum started a Friends group four years ago. We could share our experience with that undertaking.

**truman4904:** RMA Library, that is.

**Eric Wolf:** Sheila, I will be sure to include it in the proceedings and am happy to send you my notes.

**Alba:** Sorry I'll miss the session in Pasadena. Eric, has working with the Development department increased library users?

**Marilyn Carbonell:** Our docents feature a book review in their monthly newsletter and the library adds a note if the book is in our collection. If not, I order it.

**Heather Koopmans:** Hi Truman, what's your name? If we have a future chat or webinar on this we can reach out to you.

**truman4904:** Linda McKee and Megan Oliver, Ringling Museum. Megan will be at ARLIS...

**Eric Wolf:** Alba, it has created a new class of user--the Friend of the Library (we are only open to the general public by appointment), so yes.

**Heather Koopmans:** Thanks Linda and Megan.

**Heather Slania:** What other programs would you like to run if you could?

**Alison:** We've had a Friends group at the Toledo Museum of Art for almost 30 years, but I look forward to hearing new thoughts about it.

**SheilaCork:** One of the programs that didn't make it out of the gate in my initial meeting was quarterly afternoon tea with curators and books

**Heather Koopmans:** Great question Heather.

**SheilaCork:** Since then several book club members have suggested it, but I don't have the time to set it up

**Dan Moore:** Sheila, what reasons were given for rejecting afternoon tea?

**SheilaCork:** Just that the book club got a lot more interest.

**Alba:** Thank you, Eric. We now report to the Audience Engagement division of the museum and will soon start looking at ways to attract new members and work with Dev. and Membership.

**SheilaCork:** I was surprised honestly because I thought book clubs were passe at that point, but I found out that they are still going strong.

**Leah High:** Nolen actually offers a variety of programs. However, they are more single event based than recurring. Some have been in collaboration with Teen Programs in the Education Department with graphic novels, comics, etc. Some for the general public like illustrator talks.

**Leah High:** I would like to continue expanding the author events for all ages, open to the public.

**Leah High:** A book club is something I've been considering too - but I think the time commitment is very large.

**SheilaCork:** Our library does a lot of other things apart from book club as well. Poets for Art in April, trips to other museums, Intern and Docent training sessions, First Wednesday Cooks -

**Heather Koopmans:** Just want to chime in that we have about 6 minutes left. Did anyone have any final questions? Or questions I missed?

**Leah High:** Sheila, do you moderate the sessions yourself? (sorry if I missed that earlier..)

**SheilaCork:** The time commitment isn't very large after the first year. The first year is a learning curve, and after that it is less time consuming

**SheilaCork:** Yes, usually. But sometimes I have local authors come in and lead the discussions.

**Leah High:** I see - thank you

**Dan Moore:** As a general final question, do you two have any advice for a soon-to-graduate MLIS student interested in a career in museums and art libraries?

**Leah High:**

I'm happy to come back around to Dan's question from earlier:

**SheilaCork:** what programs do y'all run?

**Leah High:** Dan, from my experience - in an operation as large as the Met - the Libraries, whose primary function is to support research, are not exactly driving new programming across the Museum as a whole.

**SheilaCork:** Find one with an old librarian and volunteer! (just a joke!)

**Heather Koopmans:** Wonderful question Dan!

**Eric Wolf:** Come to the Pasadena conference if you can Dan!

**Leah High:** However, I would like to think that the Libraries are embracing an opportunity to offer new, unique programs to Museum visitors. The Education and Digital Media departments are more responsible for driving the museum's use of technology for the visitor experience, but certainly the Libraries are at the forefront of offering advanced technologies as they relate to library use and the library's collections.

**Courtney:** What advice do you have for MLIS students who want to pursue art librarianship but don't have an art library nearby? Any suggestions on other places to volunteer or get experience?

**Leah High:** volunteering or interning is always a great place to start

**SheilaCork:** College art department libraries, school libraries. Any auction houses or appraisal companies near you?

**Jessica:** Dan, I volunteered while I was earning my MLS in the library where I now work! Volunteer if you can, meet with local librarians for coffee (we librarians love our coffee), attend events and conferences

**Leah High:** Special collections of university libraries?

**Dan Moore:** Leah, thanks for responding to my earlier question. Those are interesting points.

**Leah High:** Sure thing, Dan.

**Dan Moore:** Also thanks for all the suggestions.

**Courtney:** I work for the School of Art at a university and was hoping to volunteer at the Visual Resources Center and assist our university art bibliographer. I'm also a museum docent. So I'm doing what I can!

**Marilyn Carbonell:** Local history collections in public libraries sometimes have art.

**Leah High:** also - if you are interested in public service aspects of art librarianship, your local public library is also an option for volunteering

**Jessica:** Local historical societies can help too

**SheilaCork:** On your resume you need to demonstrate research experience as well as art and archive experience. You may find them in different places.

**Leah High:** that's very true, Sheila

**Heather Koopmans:** I would add that volunteering with events at an art gallery could be useful. I did that pre-MLS and learned a lot about promotion and marketing that I still use now, as a college librarian.

**Courtney:** Thank you for the advice.

**Heather Koopmans:** Looks like we have reached the top of the hour!

**Alba:** Thank you Heather, Sheila and Leah.

**Heather Koopmans:** Thank you all for a very active conversation!

**anne:** Thanks everyone!

**Jessica:** Yes, thank you everyone!

**Heather Koopmans:** And thanks Sheila and Leah for sharing their experiences with us today.

**Leah High:** Thank you all for having us! It was a pleasure.

**Dan Moore:** Thanks all.

**Jessica:** \*applause

**SheilaCork:** thanks for the experience

**Dan Moore:** Will an archive of this chat be available?

**Heather Koopmans:** Yes, a transcript will be posted on the ARLIS website within a week or so.

**Heather Koopmans:** I will notify the listserv when that's ready.

**Maura Burns:** As a new MLIS student who just joined the ARLIS/NA list-serve last week, this discussion was fantastic. I look forward to attending more of these "lunchtime chats." Thank you for allowing me access to witness this discussion.

**Heather Koopmans:** We're glad you joined us Maura! You are welcome anytime.

**Heather Koopmans:** I hope everyone has a great week. Thanks again for joining.