

**“Visitor Studies”**

**“Evaluation”**

**What does that mean?**

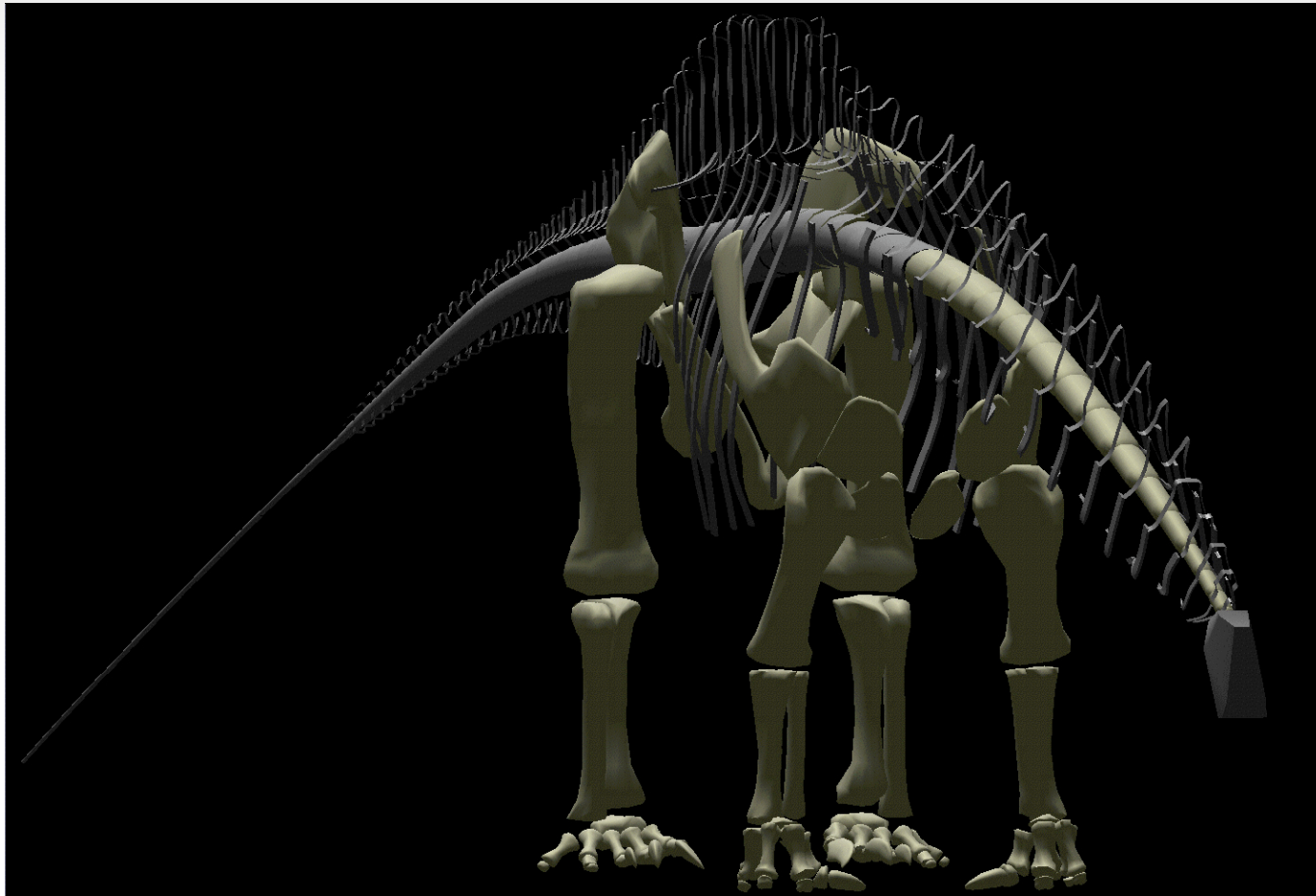
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**Here's part of an exhibition.  
Something is missing...**



**Visitors complete the picture.**



**Visitor studies = putting  
the visitor at the center of  
exhibition and program  
planning**

# Keep in Mind...

Research: No immediate practical results;  
rigorous methodology, theory building,  
hypothesis testing, replicable

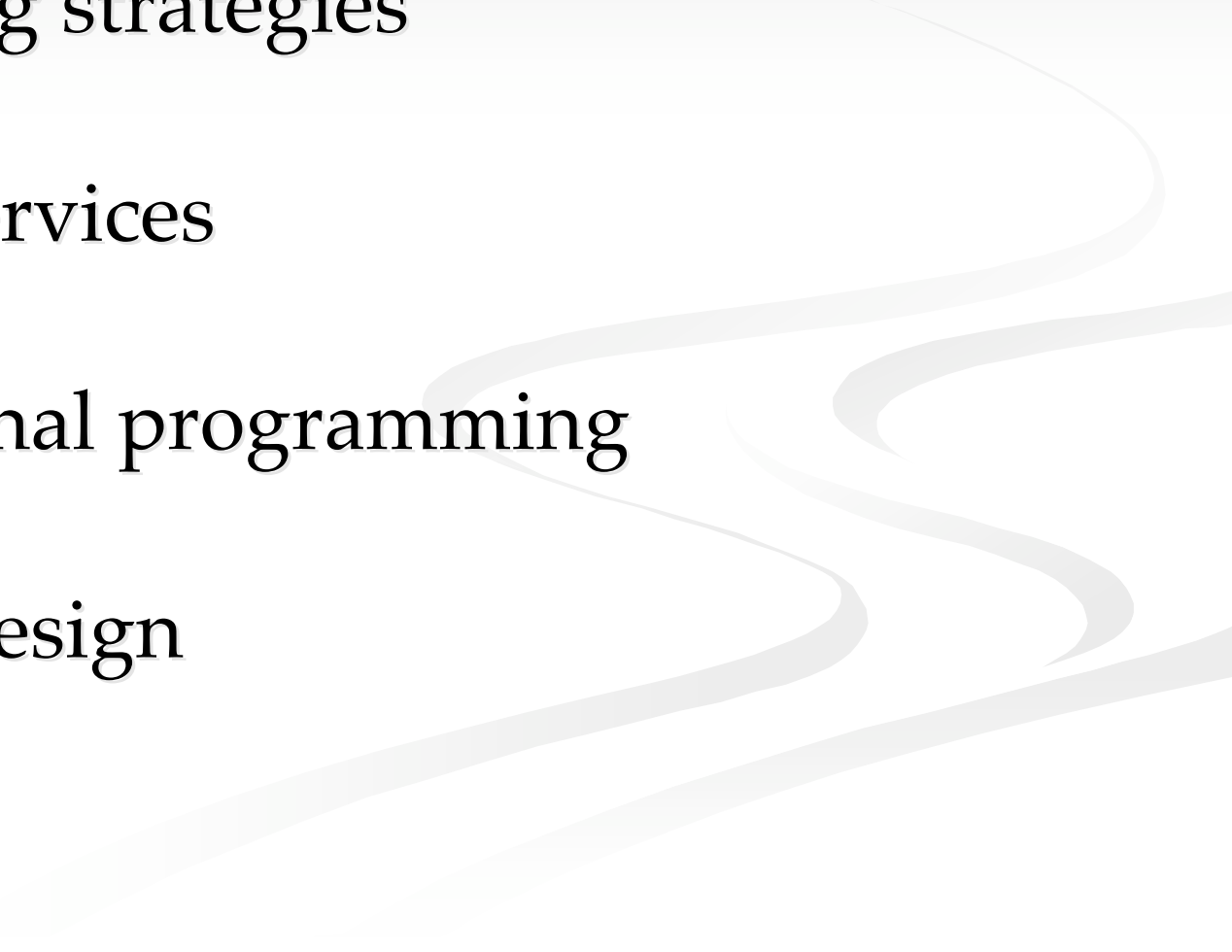
Evaluation: Process oriented, applicable to a  
specific exhibition or program, results  
usually not generalizable

Both use quantitative and qualitative  
methods

# “Evaluation” can be threatening

- It doesn't mean you are *judging* your colleagues' work (is program good or bad?)
- It *does* mean you are thinking about the consumer—the visitor—the user—during all phases of program development
- Put the emphasis on “**visitor studies**”

# Visitor studies inform decision making

- Marketing strategies
  - Visitor services
  - Educational programming
  - Exhibit design
- 
- A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, wavy, light gray lines that flow from the right side of the slide towards the left, positioned behind the list items.

# Excellent exhibitions & programs

It is not enough to have good

- Collections
- Research
- Design

They must also

- Communicate to visitors

# Learn who your visitors are

- Why are they in this museum?
- Why did they come to this exhibition?
- What are their expectations?
- Are their expectations met, exceeded or do they leave disappointed?
- How can you find out?

# 3 basic types of evaluation

Front-end: used at earliest planning stage to find out what potential audience knows about your subject and their interest level

Formative: during development phase to test ideas and prototypes with target audience

Summative: after opening, impact on visitors; can be used for remedial purposes

# Front-end or background study

- You want to know what the audience brings
  - Preconceptions to build on
  - Misconceptions to address
- Methods
  - Qualitative: group or individual depth interviews
  - Quantitative: survey, questionnaire
- Work with exhibition development team
  - Curators, interpretive writers, exhibit designers, interactive developers

# For Example, Dinosaurs

- How interested *are* visitors really?
- What can fossils reveal about locomotion?
- What do teachers want that will help them meet science curriculum standards?
- Are visitors aware of paleontologists' new tools to study dino evolution in the lab?
- Do visitors know about other types of species that co-existed with dinosaurs?
  - Insects? Fish? Mammals? Humans?

# Formative evaluation

- Most important, least formal methodology
  - Go out on the museum floor and ask visitors (potential audience) what they think
- Test: exhibit text (labels), hands-on and computer based interactives, graphics
  - What do visitors think it means?
  - Does it match what you intended?
  - If not, there's still time to change it!

# For Example, Exhibition Titles

- The title should be “catchy” to attract potential visitors and create interest in the exhibition
- But it must also convey an accurate idea of what visitors will see and experience
- An exhibition called “Drawing Shadows to Stone”: can you guess the subject?

# Remedial evaluation

- After the exhibition is finished, but before official opening, to tweak & improve
- Remedial evaluation requires:
  - Money set aside for evaluation and potential retrofitting
  - Exhibit developers and senior staff whose egos allow them to admit to making mistakes
- Unfortunately, remedial is rarely done

# Summative evaluation

- Once the exhibition or program is up and running: has it accomplished its goals?
- May be required by funding organizations
- Quantitative methods
  - Surveys, questionnaires, tracking and timing
- Qualitative methods
  - Group or individual in-depth interviews
- systematic samples, verifiable data

# How can I get started?

- You can start thinking evaluatively
- Workshops at national & regional meetings
- A growing body of literature
- Join AAM Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE)