THE COMPARATIVE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE OF ATYPICAL AND TYPICAL LEARNERS


A Thesis
by
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**Abstract**

THE COMPARATIVE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE OF ATYPICAL AND TYPICAL LEARNERS

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Community resources do their best work when they are inclusive to all those that are in the community. This is no different for those resources on a university campus - including campus museums. It is important on a university campus that includes a program such as the Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program to create a museum experience for those with different learning needs than those that are typical learners. The SDAP program, at Appalachian State University, works with students who have intellectual disabilities to reach personal growth and occupational success.

Museums are a center for learning and growing but if the experience for atypical learners and typical learners vary significantly that proves that it is not accessible for all learners. The museum may physically be accessible but to take learning behaviors and abilities into account will create a more inclusive experience for all those who visit the museum.

This thesis will introduce the problem of non-inclusive museum experiences and how experiences differ based on a learner's ability and interest. By looking at qualitative data taken from surveys, a better understanding of how the two identified populations experience a museum was created. The expectations and experiences of all groups were compared to see what each group expected from the museum and what the actual experience was.

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# Introduction

Imagine walking into a museum and not being able to comprehend what is on the walls or the conversations going on in proximity. This could be because the reading level is too difficult, there are too many moving parts, or too much noise. Now imagine walking into a museum and being able to leisurely walk around and read wall panels, take part in discussions with staff members, and learn several new things throughout the museum visit. This is the difference between atypical and typical learners. Jeffery Gilger and Bonnie Kaplan define what atypical means in their article, "Atypical Brain Development: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Developmental Learning Disabilities." "...The term atypical can encompass brain development that yields exceptionally high skills as well as low skills. If a person with exceptionally high intelligence or specialized skills is unique in the population, there is reason to suspect that his or her brain structure or function differs from the ordinary person's."[1] The most important part of that definition is, "brain structure or function differs from the ordinary person's," because being a typical learner means someone conforms to a characteristic of a group, there is very little to no difference.[2] These definitions make it clear that being a typical learner means someone learns similar to the general population - what most educational institutions tailor their work towards. If a person is atypical, they learn in unusual ways, different than the general population. Because they learn differently, atypical learners are often left out of educational institutions when staff create plans and activities. The staff of the program I pulled my atypical research participants from

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[1] Jeffery W. Gilger and Bonnie J. Kaplan, "Atypical Brain Development: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Developmental Learning Disabilities," *Developmental Neuropsychology* 20, no. 2 (2001): 465-481, doi:10.1207/S15326942DN2002_2.
[2] "Typical," Merriam-Webster, accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/typical.

are who introduced me to the term atypical and concept of atypical learning. The term atypical does not always correspond with intellectual disability or challenges but in the case of my research, it does as the atypical research participants are part of a university program that has a requirement of intellectual disability for their students. To my knowledge, no other research participant identified as an atypical learner. Self-identifying is important for differently abled people to feel comfortable in their abilities and lifestyles. Often labels are routinely placed on this demographic of people which is why I chose the terminology I did for the research participants. Atypical seemed to be the most common term used within the university program.

This research on the expectations and experiences of a museum visit is important as educational institutions and museums look for ways to bring in more visitors and convince groups to come to their location. People's leisure time is limited, and museums are in competition to be where visitors spend their time. As John Falk and Lynn Dierking write in *The Museum Experience Revisited,* "...increasing numbers of people view leisure as an opportunity to expand their understanding of themselves and their world."[3] The two authors continue on by explaining that some people will still choose resorts or adventure tourism for their leisure activities, but there is a whole category of people that want to rejuvenate within an intellectual realm of leisure time.[4] To be more inclusive and welcoming to all types of audiences will only put them ahead of the competition. Communities, made of different types of learners, want resources that represent their needs which means museums need to be more aware and find ways of including all learning types. My research breaks down the expectations and experiences of college students at different learning levels and what they

[3] John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013), 40.
[4] Falk and Dierking, *Museum Experience Revisited*, 39-41.

think of museums and museum visits. The information gained from my research will give the public history field and other educators an answer to the who, what, when, where, and why of museum visits from a college student's perspective.

As stated by Whitney H. Rapp in *Inquiry-Based Environments for the Inclusion of Students with Exceptional Learning Needs*, "we need to branch out and use as many resources as are available… that are accessible to learners in a range of ability and interest…"[5] Community resources do their best work when they are inclusive to all those that are in the community. This is no different for those resources offered by a university campus - including campus museums. Creating a museum experience for those with different or exceptional learning needs, compared to those that identify as typical learners, is an important goal for any university campus. This is especially important for a university that includes a program such as the Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program.[6] The SDAP program works with students who have mild to moderate intellectual disabilities and help them to complete an all-inclusive two-year college program. SDAP is unique to Appalachian State University as a program as it works to assist students who may struggle to have a usual college experience. By having a program like this, students with intellectual disabilities get the chance to learn, socialize, and visit with other college students and professors. While education is a top priority for the program, they also work to cover the holistic student by focusing on social, personal, and career style goals and objectives as well. By the end of the two-year program, most SDAP students leave with a Collegiate Achievement Award and skills to take into their future lives, much like someone who would complete a two-year associate degree.[7]

[5] Whitney H. Rapp, "Inquiry-Based Environments for the Inclusion of Students with Exceptional Learning Needs," *Remedial and Special Education* 26, no. 5 (2005): 297-310, https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325050260050401.

[6] "About - Scholars with Diverse Abilities," Appalachian State University, accessed September 14, 2019, https://sdap.appstate.edu/about.

[7] Appalachian State University, "About."

Museums are a center for learning and growing, but if the experience for atypical learners and typical learners varies significantly that proves that the museum is not accessible for all learners. A museum may be physically accessible due to requirements from the Americans with Disabilities Act, but taking learning behaviors and abilities into account will create a more inclusive experience for all those who visit a museum. A good way to describe the benefits of an inclusive museum experience comes from "Intrinsic motivation in museums: why does one want to learn," written by Psychologist Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi. He explains, "...the natural motivation to learn can be rekindled by supportive environments, meaningful activities, by being freed of anxiety, fear, and other negative mental states, and when the challenges of the task meet the persons' skills."[8] If the objects, writing, and materials in a museum are too complicated, the experience for atypical learners will drastically decrease in comparison to a typical learner whose skill set it does match. If museums used the practice of differentiation, adapting materials in order to accommodate different learning styles and levels of ability, they would be able to reach more audiences, including those with exceptional learning needs.[9]

Without addressing audience development, museums forget to ask important questions like 'Are ALL children welcome to participate?' 'Do we have appropriately trained staff?' 'What is the institution doing to include those with intellectual disabilities?' By asking these types of questions, museums and other educational institutions can actually see the benefits across all audiences. While atypical learners may benefit from routines and

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[8] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Kim Hermanson, "Intrinsic motivation in museums: why does one want to learn?" in *The Educational Role of the Museum,* ed. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (New York: Routledge, 2004), 147.

[9] Hannah Shepherd, "Inclusion and Museums: Developing Inclusive Practice," *British Journal of Special Education* 36, (November 2009): 142. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2009.00437.x.

structured activities, typical learners would also reap those benefits. Museums need to

represent their communities, and people with disabilities are as much a part of the

community as anyone else. By making small changes, such as providing quiet rooms for

visitors with over-stimulation struggles, multi-sensory activities for those that need to explore

more to understand, or volunteers to work one-on-one with special needs children, there are

mutual benefits for the families, volunteers, and museum staff.[10] These inclusive practices

are where museums and classrooms differ in what they can offer in terms of hands-on

education practices. As Richard Lachapelle states in his article, *Non-Expert Adults' Art-*

*Viewing Experiences,* where he studies non-expert museum visitors responses to challenging

works of art, "Non-expert informants relied on their everyday, experience-based

knowledge…", which may change in terms of intellectual disability and what every day,

experience-based knowledge looks like for these individuals.[11]

The museum I visited for this research is the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts

(TCVA), a contemporary art museum in western North Carolina.[12] This museum is

located on the Appalachian State University (ASU) campus, which made the choice simple.

Campus museums need to be inclusive to all campus members, and SDAP students are just

as much members of the university as those who identify as typical learners. All research

participants, from both typical and atypical (SDAP) groups, were ASU students. This work

introduces the problem of non-inclusive museum experiences and how a learner's ability and

interests affect their experiences. By looking at qualitative data taken from surveys I

[10] Julyne Segar, "Access for All: How to Promote Inclusion at Museums," Museum Revolution (blog), accessed December 28, 2019, https://museumrevolution.com/access-promote-inclusion-museums/.

[11] Richard Lachapelle, "Non-Expert Adults' Art Viewing Experiences: Conjugating Substance with Struggle," in *From periphery to center: art museum education in the 21st century*, ed. Pat Villeneuve (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007) 124.

[12] "Turchin Center for the Visual Arts," Turchin Center for the Visual Arts, last modified June 16, 2015, https://tcva.appstate.edu/.

conducted, a better understanding is found for of how the two identified populations experience a museum and what their expectations and experiences of the museum visit were. The objective is to bring attention to the differing experiences between the two groups and how a museum could make the experience more inclusive for both atypical and typical learners. While the research and data will be from a small sample of Appalachian State University students, the research and surveys are easily transferable and any institution could implement them as a means to test how well a museum is doing to include all those in their community - not only those who are at a specific learning level and ability.

"Museum Access: Inclusive Practices in Museums," an online study module produced by Art Beyond Sight, defines accessible museum as "a museum that welcomes people with all types of disabilities in its galleries, exhibitions and programs."[13] Art Beyond Sight is a New York City based non-profit organization that "supports access and inclusion to arts and culture, recreation, sports, and entertainment, for people with *any* physical or cognitive disability, or mental health condition."[14] Change ultimately begins at the top. If the institution's board and staff are not diverse and inclusive then there is no reason for visitors to believe the institution itself will be accepting, accessible, and inclusive. Following the administration, museum educators need to be next to focus on inclusivity. Educators are responsible for creating learning environments and activities for all visitors and all audience types. If anyone is going to assist someone in learning and appreciating what a museum has to offer, it's the educators. An ideal way of looking at education in a museum setting is that it is an extension of the classroom. While it can be a very different learning environment, there

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[13] "Module 6 – Museum Access: Inclusive Practices in Museums," Art Beyond Sight, last modified 2014, http://www.artbeyondsight.org/dic/module-6-museum-access-inclusive-practices-by-museum-teams/.

[14] "About," Art Beyond Sight, accessed January 17, 2020, https://artbeyondsight.wordpress.com/about/.

are times museums can expand upon learning styles and other learning needs that typical classrooms may lack.

Through public programming and educational activities, visitors can get a deeper understanding of the exhibits and collections within a museum. While educators making specialized programs or activities for each audience group that walks through the door is an almost impossible feat, by using universal design concepts educators could create accessible educational concepts that almost anyone could use and enjoy regardless of their abilities.[15] The Department of Justice defines effective communication as "a way to ensure that communication with people with these [communication] disabilities is equally as effective as communication with people without disabilities." This goes for all entities that serve the public (government or private sectors alike).[16] The Disability Discrimination Act (passed in 2005 in the United Kingdom) states that it is unlawful to refuse a service to a disabled person, or offer that service at a lower standard or on different terms to that which is provided to other members of the public.[17] I chose to use the DDA as example here to show that this is not just a United States concern and that it is something the United Kingdom is also including in their legislation. While the United States has ADA compliance laws, invisible disabilities such as communication disorders and intellectual struggles are often overlooked. ADA compliance requires any public institution that receives federal funding for education to not discriminate based on 'hidden' disabilities.[18] These disabilities can affect a person who may be visiting a museum and trying to learn.

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[15] Falk and Dierking, *Museum Experience Revisited*, 128.

[16] "Project Civic Access Toolkit," ADA, last modified 2007, https://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap3toolkit.htm.

[17] "Explanatory Notes to Disability Discrimination Act 2005," Department for Work and Pensions, accessed January 31, 2020, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/13/notes/division/2.

[18] "The Civil Rights of Students with Hidden Disabilities and Section 504," US Department of Education (ED), accessed January 10, 2020, https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq5269.html?exp=3.

All visitors deserve access to the content given by a museum or education institution, but why make a list of accommodations that individuals can request? Why not have the basics, such as closed captioning, larger text, lower reading levels, and tactile pieces of art, be the norm for these places? By making museums more accessible as a standard it turns a simple request that may be intimidating or embarrassing to ask for into an expectation of all visitors that a museum will automatically have. It is important that all departments within a museum work together to reach the correct communities and create a working and lasting relationship. If a museum is trying to create an exhibit on African American history, they need to work with the African American community. If they want to highlight certain local families, they need to work with those families (a smaller community size). The same goes if they want to make a museum more accessible to people with disabilities: they must work with the disability community. This is exactly what campus museums need to do when trying to make their institution inclusive and welcoming for the entire campus community. More than just typical learners, traditional students and local community members visit and the sooner a museum works to include them, the sooner they will accomplish their diversity and inclusivity goals.

By completing this research and discussing its importance, the hope is that the public history field will be better prepared and equipped to offer those with intellectual disabilities or exceptional learning needs a fulfilling experience within their educational institutions. Hannah Shepherd explains in her article, "Inclusion and museums; developing inclusive practice," in very simple terms as to why research such as this is so important. Those with learning difficulties may already struggle to participate in activities that "typify society."[19]

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[19] Shepherd, "Inclusion and museums," 145.

By including them in education plans, strategic plan execution, and other museum aspects, makes the typical activities a little more atypical friendly. If there is not a way for the visitor to intellectually break down the information it may become overwhelming, boring, or not fun for them. It should be the goal of every museum and/or educational institution to reach people with disabilities within their community. The communities that visit and learn at the Turchin Center for Visual Arts and Appalachian State University include people with disabilities which is why this goal of inclusion needs to be expected at both institutions.

**Chapter 1. Literature Review**

Throughout the process of locating resources to both create a background for my research and also show the gaps that my thesis addresses, it was simple to find that the merging of disability studies and public history is a new concept. Individually, both fields have been around for several decades or longer, but together it has been just over a decade or so where discussion of how to incorporate disability studies into public history has taken place. The goal of this chapter is to bring to light some of the work that has been done in the past and compare it to the research completed for this thesis. While there are many experts in the field, there are always areas for improvement and gaps that need to be filled with further research. As Hannah Shepherd writes, "This [need for inclusivity improvement] is indicated by the lack of published literature available about the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties, either in museum education programmes or in gallery exhibit development."[20]

Before one can start making the connections between these two different fields of study, we must have an idea of what disability studies examines. Kim Nielsen gives a brief historiography of disability in her book, *A Disability History of the United States.* The beginning of the book looks at pre-1492 years in North America and how the Indigenous people handled disability within their own cultures. She writes that within these cultures a disability was not seen as a lack of one skill, but rather an increase in another. "...Disability would come only if or when a person was removed from or was unable to participate in community reciprocity. A young man with a cognitive impairment might be an excellent water carrier. That was his gift...if he provided it well, he lived as a valued community member with no stigma."[21] Nielsen argues that during this time, and for this indigenous

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[20] Shepherd, "Inclusion and museums," 140.
[21] Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012) 3.

culture, disability was often not a burden and could increase a person's community value. As she gets closer to the present day, the outlook on disability changes - it becomes a hindrance and, in some cases, shameful. This book gives readers a chance to understand how society attaches a stigma to those with disabilities. For all sakes of connecting to my research, the stigma would be that atypical learners cannot learn anything from a museum visit. Yet, that is not true. Those with a different learning preference can learn, it just might need to be presented in a different way.

Bess Williamson, an Art Historian and Associate Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, gives another good example of disability studies in her book, *Accessible America*.[22] While this book makes less of a direct connection to atypical and typical learners within a museum, it does showcase what accessibility has looked like for Americans throughout time. From iron lungs in the early twentieth century to wheelchair paths at universities, the book walks the reader through protests, trials, and eventually the Americans with Disabilities Act.[23] By reading this book I was able to see the importance of doing my research and why others in the field should be taking accessibility into account. Williamson argues that when someone lives with a disability that does not mean it limits them from learning, exploring, and visiting institutions that can increase knowledge and skill. *Accessible America* was a foundational piece in making the connection between disability studies and what I could do with research in the public history field.

The easiest place to start when looking at the cross points of museum education, museum studies, and disability studies is that of learning theories and learning styles. Lynn

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[22] Bess Williamson, *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).
[23] Williamson, *Accessible America*.

Dierking, a specialist in the field of museum education, explains in her article, "Learning Theory and Learning Styles: An Overview," that learning is an active process and because of this, how and what a museum visitor learns is ultimately dependent on their learning style preference or developmental stage.[24] I was first introduced to learning styles through a learning style inventory titled VARK. This inventory was created by Neil Fleming in 1987 and is commonly used by teachers and educators to help students identify which style they are strongest in. The four learning styles that VARK uses are auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and reading/writing. [25] While learning styles is a commonly used phrase and model in both the education and museum fields, the other term used is multiple intelligences. This learning theory was proposed by Howard Gardner, an American Psychologist. His learning theory says an individual person houses seven different intelligences that lead a person to process information in a certain way. [26] In the case of my research, learning styles and theories such as VARK are a simpler way of explaining how a person may learn in a museum setting while Gardner's theory would take a more complex understanding of psychology and would require more in-depth research. In terms of museums using my research it is best for museum educators to understand that all learners are diverse and may learn using a different learning style.

The connection between Dierking's analysis of learning theories and that of atypical learners is, "...developmental stages do not seem to hold true for all individuals in all areas of

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[24] Lynn Dierking, "Learning Theory and Learning Styles: An Overview," *Journal of Museum Education* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 5, doi:10.1080/10598650.1991.11510159.
[25] "Introduction to VARK," VARK, last modified 2020, https://vark-learn.com/introduction-to-vark/.
[26] "Multiple Intelligences: What Does the Research Say?" Edutopia, last modified July 20, 2016, https://www.edutopia.org/multiple-intelligences-research.

learning."[27] Many of  the research participants in my study are at a different developmental

stage, which affects their learning style preferences.

In "Museum-Goers: Life-Styles and Learning Characteristics," Charles Gunther, a

German American collector, whose collections reside with the Chicago Historical Society,

uses the founder of About Learning, an instructional design and development firm, Bernice

McCarthy's adult learning types as a way to explain how and why adults visit museums.[28]

The four different types are type one, type two, type three, and type four. The 4Mat system of

teaching-learning styles and each type explains how someone in each type perceives

information, how they learn, what they like and excel at, and what they look for when

visiting a museum. Type one learners seek personal meaning and may ask the questions

'why?' Type two learners look for facts within the labels and statements in a museum

exhibit. The question they are likely to ask is 'what?' Type three learners are most interested

in the process behind the art or the evolution of an object, because of this interest they may

ask the 'how' question. The last learning type, type four, is the most likely to take a class at

the museum so they can have the chance to experiment and try out different ideas, leading

them to the common question of 'if.'[29]

Based on the survey responses within this research, comparisons can be made

between McCarthy's adult learning types and those who participated in my research study.

Gunther includes a statement about the validity of these learning types that relates to this

study of atypical vs. typical learners within a museum. He argues, "...All four learning styles

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[27] Dierking, "Learning Theory," 4.

[28] "Inside the Collection ," Chicago History Museum, last modified November 14, 2017, https://www.chicagohistory.org/snow-goggles/); "McCarthy, Bernice," SAGE Publications Inc, accessed March 21, 2020, https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/author/bernice-mccarthy).

[29] Charles F. Gunther, "Museum-Goers: Life-Styles and Learning Characteristics," *in The Educational Role of the Museum*, ed. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (New York: Routledge, 2004), 122.

are equally valid and are usually found equally present in the typical group of adult learners. If learning is directed toward only one type of learner, the others are not receiving the message."[30] The fact that this statement directly mentions a 'typical group' of adult learners creates the question, are there separate learning types for atypical learners or does that mean they are not considered within this type of research that Gunther and McCarthy did? Perhaps this is an area where the study of atypical learners (or learners with a variety of different disabilities) is not merged well within the study of museums or public history.

The problem that does come up that is easy for a museum to address is how to know where each visitor is developmentally. In cases of school groups, a teacher may disclose that some of her students are not developmentally at grade level or may need extra help. Dierking writes, "In dealing with visitors in informal settings, it is important to have some general sense of their developmental levels while appreciating that there may be great variability among individuals."[31] But, how does a museum figure this out with their day-to-day visitors? This is where the concept of demographic research, providing a variety of education materials, and offering special hours or events for those with exceptional needs to visit may help. These tools assist in creating focus groups, email lists, etc. to create more inclusive accessibility and availability within the museum. By asking difficult questions a museum can further their understanding of learning types and create more opportunities for the public.

Another topic that directly relates to my research study is museum visitors having prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences that affect their museum visit. Dierking states that these prior experiences and knowledge heavily influence the learning experience.[32] The pre-

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[30] Gunther, "Museum-Goers," 123.
[31] Dierking, "Learning Theory," 5.
[32] Dierking, "Learning Theory," 5.

visit survey question "Have you ever been to the TCVA before?" makes the connection between prior experience and my research. It is likely that the research participants who had previously visited TCVA will have different expectations than those who had not visited before. In *The Museum Experience Revisited*, Dierking and John Falk write, "Repeat visitors to the same museum not only know what to expect and how to find it, but also know which parts and activities they enjoy and which they do not."[33] While this is not the main idea of my research, visitor services and visitor experience does play a part in understanding the responses from the surveys. Visitor experience ultimately creates the foundation of the comparative museum experience in which the entire project is based.

The physical experience of a previous museum visit is not the only factor that affects a new museum visit. What a person brings with them also influences their expectations and experiences. Dierking and Falk highlight this when discussing museum experiences and expectations. "...Some visitors have disabilities - poor eyesight or hearing, mobility challenges, mental limitations - that they bring with them to the visit, or that may prevent them from visiting at all."[34] *The Museum Experience Revisited*, released in 2013, creates a rather new prospective on the implications of disability and public history institutions. Though one or two sentences within an entire chapter makes it difficult to relate all the scenarios that may take place in a public history institution to the realm of disability studies.

There is a way to better bridge the gap between these two fields and that is the idea of inclusive practices. Inclusive practices are recommendations created to include those who may be differently abled or prefer a different way of learning than those who fall into the typical category of able-bodies or learning.  Shepherd explains what an inclusive society

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[33] Falk and Dierking, *Museum Experience Revisited*, 84.
[34] Falk and Dierking, *Museum Experience Revisited,* 83.

would look like, "…to make use of mainstream services and to be 'fully included in the local community' museums are understood as being included in those mainstream services."[35] This is something that is more common in traditional classrooms where there may be more support for students who need it, whereas a museum may only have one museum educator and a group of 20-30 people at a time. Due to this, it is important that all departments of a museum are taking the chance to learn and implement inclusive practices. This will better suit a wider variety of museum visitors. Hannah Shepherd, an exhibition coordinator at Freeman College, writes, "...considering learning styles, the learning environment, and, in the case of school visitors, the grouping of pupils and differentiation of tasks, museum staff can apply recommendations for creating an inclusive learning experience for visiting school pupils and the public."[36] Notice that she writes, "museum staff," indicating all of the staff, not just one department. Inclusion needs to include education but also exhibitions, facilities, management, and planning. Boards and administration also need to showcase this ideal of inclusivity and understanding as they ultimately are the ones making decisions for the rest of the museum. It is known that museum staff may not be experts on the subject of inclusion, but that is where more training and resources need to come in. Shepherd's article includes a table titled, "Creating environments that are conducive to learning" which is cited from the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council, 2004. I located this list online at "Inspiring Learning For All."[37] This list explains four different ways a museum could incorporate inclusive environments:

1.  Create a plan to identify and remove obstacles that inhibit people from learning

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[35] Shepherd, "Inclusion and museums," 140.
[36] Shepherd, "Inclusion and museums," 140.
[37] "Fresh Perspectives," Arts Council England, accessed February 20, 2020, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/.

2. Ensure that people have access to knowledge, resources and collections at times and in ways that suit them

3. Make the physical and virtual learning environment welcoming and accessible

4. Design learning environments and present knowledge, resources and collections to reflect different learning styles and enable learning and discussion[38]

These options for creating an inclusive space is something that museums should strive to use and include in their strategic plans for intended use. Shepherd is a museum professional who is acknowledging the demands of those who have disabilities, which is great in terms of merging the two fields. This needs to be done by more professionals within museum studies and public history, and this can be accomplished if public history professionals and disability studies professionals work together to answer mutual questions and concerns.

Inclusive practices for museums can come in different varieties. Liya Deng discusses some of these practices in their article, "Inclusive Museum and Its Impact on Learning of Special Needs Children." The main purpose of this article is to have a better understanding of unconventional learning environments for those who learn differently or have disabilities. The main age group of their research is children. To indicate why their research is important, Deng writes, "...providing alternative information access solutions is imperative for the overall well-being of this special group of information consumers."[39] For people who identify in the disability group the alternative information access could be key for them to take in and retain information on a museum visit.

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[38] Shepherd, "Inclusion and museums," 143.
[39] Liya Deng, "Inclusive museum and its impact on learning of special needs children," *Proc. Assoc. Info. Sci. Tech.* 52 (November 2015): 1, https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.2015.1450520100110.

Deng's article looks at what museum visits are like for autistic individuals while my personal research is looking at a much broader group of atypical learners. For atypical learners, processing information and organizing it will be done in an unusual way, much like those who are autistic. That being said, much of Deng's research can correlate with the SDAP student's trip to the TCVA. The main take away from this article is, "The implication of this research is that there need to be more opportunities for collaboration between the special needs community and museums because the holistic museum experience plays a vital role in cognitive and social development of special needs children."[40] This is a main goal of my own research as well. SDAP students are as much a part of the Appalachian State University Campus as is TCVA. The scholar's program and the museum should be working in tandem to make learning and education more accessible to those who fall into the atypical learner category.

For museums to offer a better museum experience one of the main options for them is to become acquainted with the concept of universal design. While physical accessibility will always be at the front of museum staff and any institution's minds, the educational accessibility still needs to be. One way this can happen is through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This method branches off the general physical accessibility methods to incorporate flexible design measures for education and the way it is shared. This means, "reducing barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges…"[41] Examples of barrier reduced design are information in multiple formats and media, multiple ways of engagement, interests, and motivation, and a safe environment for

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[40] Deng, "Inclusive museum," 4.
[41] Anna Johnson, Kimberly Huber, Nancy Cutler, Melissa Bingmann and Tim Grove, *Museum Educators Manual: Educators Share Successful Techniques* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 134.

the learning to occur.[42] Through inclusive practices more visitors, students or not, are able to have a more educational and fulfilling experience.

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[42] Johnson, et al., *Museum Educators*, 134.

**Chapter 2. Methods**

To conduct the primary research for this project, I created pre- and post-visit surveys that compared the individual expectations to the individual experiences of visiting a museum (Appendix A). The Scholars with Diverse Abilities Students (SDAP) were chosen based on the requirements to be in the SDAP program at Appalachian State University. Each of the SDAP students has identified as having an intellectual disability, which qualifies them as atypical learners. After reaching out to the SDAP program, Director Anna Ward assisted in connecting me, the principal investigator, to the students for the research. The simplest way to get all the students together in one place was to use their Career and Practical Living class (SPE 3061), taught by Rebekah Cummings. This class is where I and the atypical research participants met and completed the pre-visit survey.

The general population was recruited through a call for participants flyer (Appendix B). This call was distributed via social media, by professors to their students, and through individual scholarship program announcements. These distribution channels thus covered a variety of ages, majors, and backgrounds. The general population recruitment efforts resulted in five different participants. All of the research participants (all groups: atypical learners from SDAP, SDAP assistants, and general population) ranged from the ages of 18-24, all genders, and all museum visitation levels. This research includes a total of eighteen research participants.

Each student was given a packet that included a page of consent information, biographical questions, both pre and post-visit surveys, and three optional notes pages. These packets were anonymous so as to not give away the identities of any of the research participants. The first group of participants, SDAP students, met the primary investigator during one of their classes, which was arranged by their instructor Rebekah Cummings. This

original meeting was so the students could become comfortable with me as I was the one who would be leading them through the museum visit and conducting the research. On the day of the museum visit (November 13, 2019), ten SDAP students completed the pre-visit survey in their classroom. There were also three self-identified typical students who assisted the SDAP students during the visit.  These three students were SDAP social work interns and SDAP graduate assistants. All three completed research packets. These three participants were placed into a third group during data analyzing and are never counted within the typical participant group. As a group all students traveled to the campus museum, TCVA, and completed the museum visit as if it was a regular visit without a study being conducted. During the visit, each student had the option of taking notes on what they were seeing, interactive tools they may be using, and to whom they were asking questions. After the visit, they completed the post-visit survey while still in the museum. Once they turned in their packets (complete or incomplete if they opted out of research participation), the students were free to go. All research packets were placed in a sealable envelope to protect participant confidentiality.

The same process took place with the general student population that was recruited for the identified typical learners. There were a total of 5 participants in the general population group. The only differences between the two groups were the number of participants and the information contained on the first page of the research packet (Appendix A). The SDAP students had a schedule of what they would be doing, as that provided them with structure on a day where their routine was drastically changing. The identified typical learners were given a front page with the confidentiality statement that is usual for the front of a research packet. The cover pages were an added protection of information as the first

page of questions was biographical. The main goal of the visit was to get each participant, SDAP student, typical learner with SDAP students, and identified typical students of the general population, to visit and walk through the museum as if they were visiting during their own leisure time. All students were encouraged to interact with staff members, peers, and technology throughout the museum, and all aspects of museum exhibits.

After all museum visits took place, I analyzed the qualitative data by looking for differences or similarities in the pre-visit survey and differences in the post-visit survey (expectations and experiences). These data points were logged into an Excel document to keep them organized. Each group of students were logged into individual sheets in the document to keep each visit separate. It needs to be noted that the three self-identified typical participants that attended the museum with the SDAP students (atypical group) were placed in their own group – making there a total of three research participant groups. The optional notes sheet was also logged into the digital document.  I used any notes the participants took to identify if there was anything that stood out to the research participants during the museum visit.

**Biographical Information Data Points**

Most of the biographical information from the survey is very basic: age, gender, and how often do you attend a museum. However, there is one question that needs to be clarified. The first question is, "Are you in the Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program?" This question was necessary for distinguishing between the two groups without asking any identifiable information. The original question was, "What disabilities do you identify having," but the SDAP staff suggested not using this question. The main reason is that many of the students would have listed disabilities such as vision impairment, hearing loss, and

other physical disabilities. The staff pointed out that the students may not recognize their

intellectual disability, when that is what this study is focusing on. The biographical

information also allowed the participants to fill in age and gender as it is important to let the

participants self-identify without having pre-chosen options (see Table 1 through Table 4).

**Table 1: Age of research participants**

| Age of Participants | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| 18 | 2 |
| 19 | 4 |
| 20 | 5 |
| 21 | 2 |
| 22 | 0 |
| 23 | 4 |
| 24 | 1 |

**Table 2: Gender of research participants**

| Gender | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Male | 10 |
| Female | 8 |

**Table 3: How often do you visit a museum?**

| How Often Do You Visit a Museum? | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| First Time | 2 |
| Once a Month | 0 |
| 1 or More Times Every Six Months | 8 |
| Less Than Once A Year | 7 |
| Other | 1 (Hardly Ever) |

**Pre-Visit Survey Data Points**

**Table 4: Have you visited TCVA before?**

| Have you visited TCVA before? | Number of Participants |
| --- | --- |
| Yes | 12 |
| No | 6 |

 

One of the main goals of this research is to examine the similarities and/or differences regarding the expectations of a museum visit between the two groups of students. While the responses from the SDAP students were much shorter and limited due to education level and ability, their responses from the pre-visit survey were easily compared to those of the identified typical student group. 88.9% of the research participants stated that labels and/or pictures are what makes an exhibit easy to follow. SDAP students may find reading full labels or focusing for an extended period-of-time difficult, they still find labels to be helpful in learning.  While typical learners have the ability to read most exhibit labels, they also find pictures to be beneficial to following a museum exhibit.

**Question: What do you hope to see at the museum?**

SDAP: "Different art" and "Different artifacts"

Typical: "Art I've never seen before, information about the meaning and creative process behind it."

**Figure 1: What do you hope to see at the museum?**

The biggest commonality between all three groups was the favorite type of museum. The survey question asked, "What is your favorite kind of museum? Art, history, science, etc.?" While most of the participants listed two types of museums as their favorites, the totals came out to almost even: history and science were both listed eight times and art was listed as a favorite six times. The unexpected response to this question, due to the uniqueness of responses, was that three of the SDAP students picked different or specific museums as their favorite type of museum, which is something that did not come up in the other two groups. Three SDAP participants listed technology, sports, and the space museum in D.C., as their favorite type of museum. It is important to note that most participants stuck to the three example types but those three SDAP students strayed from that and gave less popular responses. For more examples of similarities between survey responses see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

> **Question: What makes a museum fun and exciting?**
>
> SDAP: "very interactive"
>
> Typical with SDAP: "interactive rooms"
>
> Typical: "interactives and discussing information with docents or the people I am visiting the museum with"

**Figure 2: What makes a museum fun and exciting?**

There were some differences in the pre-visit surveys that were unexpected. When comparing the responses to the question, "How do you want to learn information in a museum," the answers between the SDAP students and the typical student group differed. The self-identified typical students that attended the museum visit with the SDAP students had answers that fell between the two other groups. The SDAP students expected a museum to be more exciting and fun if someone was around to explain what they were looking at. This response supports research on what people with intellectual disabilities need to be more successful. More structure and routine in a museum visit is appreciated by students in the SDAP program as one tool they use within the SDAP program is using schedules and daily routines to be successful in their collegiate lives. An example of this is when the SDAP program staff suggested I put a schedule on the front of their research packet instead of wordy descriptions (see Appendix A).

The typical student group expected to enjoy the museum visit more if they were able to read what was on the walls and interact with the materials and technology. This difference in responses to this question directly shows why those with intellectual disabilities may find museums difficult to navigate because of the amount of reading required, especially if the reading level is too advanced for them. As Csikszentmihalyi states in "Intrinsic Motivation in

Museums," "...the challenges of the activity must match the skills of the individual."[43] This idea is a follow up to his explanation of the 'flow experience,' which is where an action is able to hold a person's attention because the individual's skill level and the task at hand are equal so the individual will continue to complete the task. For museums the "flow" experience can be a challenge, as every visitor will have a different skill level. Matching that skill level to an activity or reading level becomes an almost impossible task.

The other concern for museums during the museum visit experience is accessibility and the vast amounts of reading throughout the institution. Reading is typically optional but in many cases the labels, artist statement, etc. is needed for a better understanding of the exhibit.  During the museum visit with the SDAP students, there was a participant who was visually impaired, but this impairment was not documented in any of the survey or biographical written responses. Their disability was only known from personal interaction with the participant and observing them during the visit.  There were only two mentions of visual impairment on the surveys, and both were from a typical learner assisting the SDAP group. It can be assumed that this participant was personally working with the SDAP participant who was visually impaired. The typical learner assisting the SDAP group participant responded to the question, "What assistive devices might be helpful when attending a museum," by writing, "audio for those visually impaired/or who may have a hard time reading." This came from the pre-visit survey. The other mention of physical disabilities was from the post-visit survey in response to the question, "Was there anything you did not like/did not enjoy." The response was, "It was kinda hard for a visually impaired student in some darker rooms, brighter lighting may help." While skill level or reading level is

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[43] Csikszentmihalyi, "Intrinsic motivation," 147.

important, the accessibility of museums for those with more than just intellectual disabilities is important as well.

It is important to note that those who completed the museum visit while assisting those in SDAP had a response that fell somewhere between the responses of the SDAP participants and general population participants. Figure 3 maps out the responses to the question, "How do you want to learn information in a museum" to give a more visual understanding of how different the responses between groups were. It can be hypothesized that this is because the self-identified typical students who visited the museum with the SDAP students themselves, are typical learners and may not have issues with reading exhibit labels, signs, etc. However, due to witnessing what the SDAP students were struggling with or asking questions about, the typical learners understood that guides and assistance are necessary for the atypical learner population.
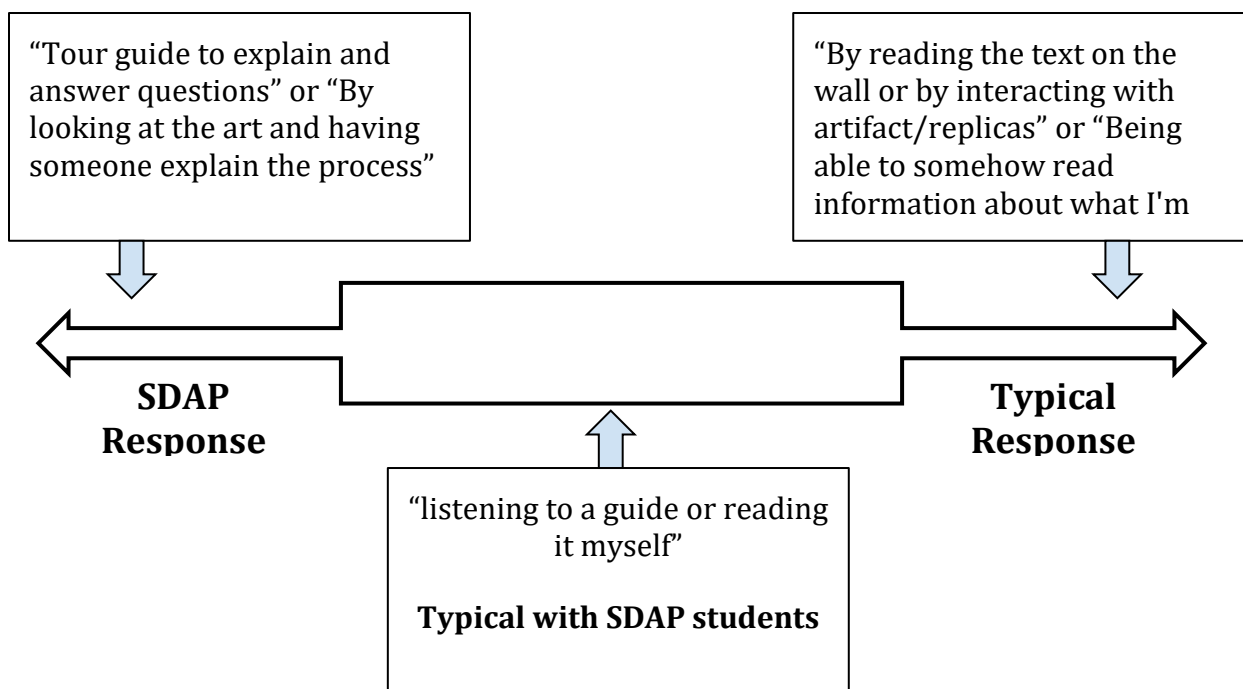
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Tour guide to explain and answer questions" or "By looking at the art and having someone explain the process" | | "By reading the text on the wall or by interacting with artifact/replicas" or "Being able to somehow read information about what I'm |

**SDAP Response**          **Typical Response**

"listening to a guide or reading it myself"

**Typical with SDAP students**

**Figure 3: How do you want to learn information in a museum**

The last question on the pre-visit survey was, "What assistive devices might be helpful when attending a museum?" This question had a variety of answers and was inconclusive on what might be similar between all three groups. The top answer, at 41.2% or 7 out of 17 responses, was guidance in the form of a person, tour guide, or map. This answer is very similar to what the answer was to the learning in museums question. When someone wants to learn something and may struggle with it, an assistive device would be beneficial. If the museum is trying to be all inclusive of other disabilities, someone to explain exhibits, directions, or artist information would be the best.

**Post-Visit Survey Data Points**

For the post-visit it was important for the survey to stay almost identical to the pre-visit one that each participant completed. This is so there could be comparison within each group from expectation to experience but also the comparison between the group expectations and experiences. The goal of the research is to see if there are similarities or

differences between the different groups of learners which can further emphasize the need to make museums inclusive to all learners and learning types.

The first question on the post-visit survey again asks if it is the participant's first time at TCVA. The answers did not change for anyone between the two surveys for this question (see Table 4). A characteristic that is seen throughout the survey is that many of the responses from the SDAP students are basic in content, describing simple things that they experienced during the museum visit. This differs from the identified typical learner group, as their responses were much more complex about their experiences. A clear example of this is found in Figure 4. One of the SDAP student participants found that something as simple as touching something made for a better museum experience, whereas the typical learner found that artwork describing the intent of social change is what made them get excited during the visit. While both groups found something exciting in the visit, the two experiences were vastly different. Museum professionals should ask, can anything be changed to help those with intellectual disabilities find something intellectually stimulating within a museum, or is excitement surrounding a physical/touching aspect of the visitor experience enough?

**Figure 4: What made the museum fun and exciting for you?**

Another difference in the museum visit experience were the responses to the question "What did you enjoy seeing at the museum?" While one SDAP student participant responded that "I didn't really enjoy it," other participants from that group identified that they enjoyed certain exhibits the most. 60% of the participants from the SDAP group mentioned a specific exhibit that they enjoyed, which was an unexpected response because some of their responses, from the pre-visit survey, were not so specific. For more information on the specific exhibits that were being shown during the time of the museum visit, see Appendix C. Three of the SDAP participants listed the bottom level/last exhibit as the most enjoyable while another three preferred the main level/first exhibit. While the first exhibit was abstract it was very colorful and used a lot of visually appealing shapes and forms. The last exhibit was less abstract but still very colorful and included more than one medium of art. None of the SDAP responses explained their reasonings for enjoying those specific exhibits.

The response from one of the identified typical learner participants was, "I enjoyed the refugee exhibit and the piece of a letter that the artist redacted to make it positive." While this encompasses parts of two different exhibits, it is very specific to pieces of artwork or what the exhibits were about. Other responses from the general population group of participants covered the reason and way an exhibit was laid out, the artist's name, and enjoying an exhibit based on the context. Once again, what the general population/typical learners got out of their museum experience was different and vastly more complex than those in the atypical learner group (SDAP). Much like the question from the pre-visit survey, "How do you want to learn information in a museum," there was a question on the post-visit survey that received almost identical responses from the same groups. The question on the post-visit survey was asked slightly differently: "What helped you learn information at the

museum?" 40% of the participants in that group said hearing someone explain something or listening to an audio description was the most helpful. All participants in the identified typical learner group said that labels, descriptions, reading, etc. was the most helpful. This once again drives home the point that reading levels play a role in the museum visit experience. It can only be assumed that the atypical learners group prefers audio/speaking methods of interpretation to text/reading methods because of their learning preferences and abilities.  The comparison of expectations and experiences between individuals in a single group and the comparison between groups will be discussed in the chapter on case studies.



**Figure 5: Word Cloud SDAP Response - What exhibit was easiest to follow?**

The next question on the post-visit survey asked, "What exhibit was easiest to follow and why?" Figure 5 visually shows the responses from participants in the SDAP group.[44] A

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44 Educational Computer Games and Apps for Kids, ABCya, accessed March 31, 2020, https://www.abcya.com/games/word_clouds.

word cloud shows which word is repeated the most.  Through this image, one can see that

pictures and audio are the most repeated words from the responses. While only one

participant named an actual exhibit in their response, the other nine responded to the 'why' in

the question.  This question between the two main groups showed the most difference in

responses. While the SDAP group mostly focused on the 'why,' the identified typical group

focused on the 'what exhibit' part of the question. Three out of the five participants in the

general population group answered that the refugee exhibit was the easiest to follow because

of the artist's statement, but also because the exhibit was free flowing and there was not a

specific way to view the exhibit. Only one participant in the general population group

mentioned pictures and labels like the SDAP group.

The first question of the post-visit survey that was vastly different than the pre-visit

survey was, "Did this museum change your views on museums?" While looking back at this

question, it was not worded very well and there was not a clear expectation for a  response to

help indicate anything about the visit.  50% of all participants answered no. Most said no

because they already like museums, so this did not change their opinion. One participant

openly wrote, no, because they do not like museums. Again, this question and responses did

not move the research and understanding of expectations vs. experiences along any further.

With the next question, "What assistive devices were helpful when attending the museum,"

one third of the participants said the audio/headphones that were included in one of the

exhibits. Below is a chart, "Figure 6: What assistive devices were the most helpful," to show

what each group thought of the assistive devices throughout their visit.

While most participants enjoyed the use of audio/headphones in the museum space, one person from the identified typical group stated that using the audio took them out of the experience. This response was answering the final question on the post-visit survey, "Was there anything you did not like/did not enjoy?" A majority of the SDAP participants enjoyed the museum as 70% of the SDAP participants responded to that question with 'no.' One participant from the SDAP group did say they wanted the museum to be more exciting. This is likely to be a response that comes from any survey taken at any museum. There will always be visitors who do not think the exhibits are exciting enough or do not showcase what the visitor wants it to showcase.
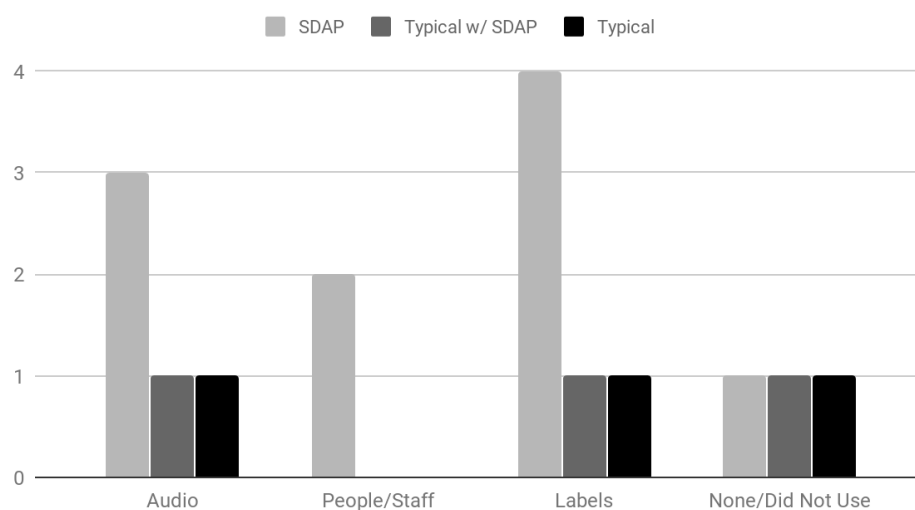
What assistive devices were the most helpful?



**Figure 6: What assistive devices were the most helpful?**

Overall, the survey research suggests that there is a difference between the expectations and experiences of atypical and typical learners during a museum visit. While there were more similarities in the pre-visit survey, there were more differences in the post-visit. Many of these differences stem from the support that the SDAP group had wanted or expected. More visuals, audio, and staff support seemed to be the main factors the museum

was lacking for the SDAP group. The survey responses showed that the SDAP group wanted more interaction, while the general population group seemed to get more from the abstract art, labels, and the availability to go through the museum at their own pace. All of these different aspects cannot be changed at once, but acknowledging the expectations and experiences of the three groups would help any museum to understand areas that need improvement for their atypical visitors.

**Chapter 3. case studies**

When looking at expectations and experiences that a person experiences at a museum it is important to examine the entire experience, from start to finish, or in the case of this research, from pre to post-visit. In this section I will discuss one participant from each of the three groups to explore why the expectations and experiences may differ and to see the complete museum visit from a specific viewpoint. When choosing which participant to highlight in each case study, I chose the research packet with the most complete and readable information. This does not mean the other packets did not have good information. It may have been that some of the questions were not answered and the writing was not legible. It is important to note that Lorraine Maxwell and Gary Evans argue, "The personal context of our museum experience includes our prior knowledge of museums, our interest in a particular museum or exhibits and our motivation to be in the museum."[45] Each of these case studies is personal: it reflects one person's experience at the museum. While it is important to reflect upon personal experiences, it does not mean that experience was the same for everyone. The objective with the case studies is to create a more complete idea of what an atypical learner expects and experiences in a museum compared to what a typical learner expects and experiences during a visit to the same museum. Then, based on the case studies, we can summarize and recommend what can help change the experiences to match the expectations.

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[45] Lorraine E. Maxwell and Gary W. Evans, "Museums as Learning Settings: The Importance of the Physical Environment," *The Journal of Museum Education* 27, no. 1 (2002): 3-7, www.jstor.org/stable/40479225.

Case study 'SDAP Student - Atypical Learner Group'

*Description*

Students who are accepted into the Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program have an

intellectual disability of some kind. This by default places them in the Atypical Learner Group

for this study.

Date of museum visit: November 13, 2019

*Biographical Information*

- SDAP Student
- Male
- Age: 19
- Visits a museum: 1 or more times every six months

*Pre-Visit Survey*

- Have you visited TCVA before: Yes
- What do you hope to see in a museum: different artifacts
- What makes a museum exciting and fun: getting to learn
- How do you want to learn information in a museum: looking and talking
- What makes an exhibit easy to follow: pictures, sculptures
- What is your favorite kind of museum: history, science
- What assistive devices might be helpful: headphones, touching

*Post-Visit Survey*

- What did you enjoy seeing in the museum: different art galleries
- What made the museum exciting and fun: the touching part of the museum because it made the experience better
- What helped you learn information in the museum: the photography gallery because it had lots of artifacts
- What exhibit was easiest to follow and why: the pictures because it was easy to follow and to learn
- Did the museum change your views on museums: more artifacts
- What assistive devices were helpful: the headphones in the touching room
- Was there anything you did not enjoy: it needs to be more exciting

**Figure 7: Case study 'SDAP Student - Atypical Learner Group'**

**Summary:**

The SDAP students do not represent every person at Appalachian State University that identifies as having an intellectual disability. This was a small sample of students and this case study only focuses on one student from the sample. Looking at a case study like this does, however, give an idea of what this student hoped to see and learn at the museum and what they actually got out of it. To summarize the study, the main points are:

❖ Expectation: to learn through visuals at the museum
❖ Experience:  there were many different photographs to see

❖ Expectation: headphones and touching would be helpful
❖ Experience: the headphones and touching were actually helpful

The overall summary of this participant's museum visit is that there were more artifacts (art pieces) in the museum than they expected, and the assistive devices stood out to them.  Being able to interact with the art was beneficial. This participant did feel the museum needed to be more exciting. What "exciting" looks like for this individual is unknown, but with further investigation or questioning, that answer would be possible to obtain. This student stated that they attend a museum one or more times every six months, which means that this participant is rather familiar with museums and has a good idea of what they want to see when they visit.

**Recommendations:**

Based on this specific museum experience from one SDAP student, one recommendation to improve museum experiences for atypical learners is to include more visuals and interactive exhibits.  Many of the expectations and positive experiences for someone who is an atypical learner stem from the idea of visuals and using their sense of touch. A way of incorporating that into an art museum can be seen from what other museums around the country and world are doing. For example, the Canadian Museum of Human

Rights is creating 3-dimensional pieces of their photographs so those who are visually

impaired or prefer to learn through touch can experience visual arts.[46] The Smithsonian

Institution in Washington D.C. has created tours specifically for those who are visually

impaired, where the docents use more descriptive words, music, and objects that the visitors

can hold or touch. These elements provide a more interactive element to the art museum.[47]

One thing that TCVA could use for those who are kinesthetic learners is the painter's

palette, much like The Smithsonian is using, which has molded brushstrokes on it so the

visitor could feel the difference between types of painting and understand artwork even

better. Kinesthetic learners are those who often excel with direct involvement, physical

control, and likely have excellent dexterity.[48] There are many other art museums around the

world working on ways to make artwork more accessible and it does not have to be just for

the visually impaired. Figure 8 describes the experience of a self-identified typical learner

who went on the museum visit with the SDAP students. This participant shares a perspective

of attending a museum with someone that is in the atypical group. Not everyone learns

through walking and looking; interactives are necessary and the case study for the SDAP

student shows that interaction and tactiles may help. This could also be the answer to why

this specific student did not find the museum exciting: there was limited touching available.

[46] "New Exhibit of Photography by Blind Artists Redefines Sight and Ability," CMHR, accessed February 10, 2020, https://humanrights.ca/news/new-exhibit-of-photography-by-blind-artists-redefines-sight-and-ability.

[47] Victoria Sanchez, "Smithsonian Offers Tours for Visually Impaired," WJLA, last modified December 1, 2018. https://wjla.com/news/local/smithsonian-tours-visually-impaired.

[48] Kendra Cherry, "Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences," Verywell Mind, accessed April 10, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/gardners-theory-of-multiple-intelligences-2795161.

Case study 'Identified Typical Learner - Visit with SDAP Students'

*Description*

During the museum visit with the SDAP Students - Atypical Learner Group there were three

typical identifying learners there to assist these students. They participated in the study as well.

These students give an interesting perspective as they learn like one group but are aware of the

other group's learning abilities.

Date of museum visit: November 13, 2019

*Biographical Information*

- Non-SDAP Student
- Female
- Age: 23
- Visits a museum: 1 or more times every six months (First Fridays every few months)

*Pre-Visit Survey*

- Have you visited TCVA before: Yes
- What do you hope to see in the museum: I always love the exhibit in the first room
- What makes a museum exciting and fun: interactive rooms
- How do you want to learn information in a museum: reading information about things that catch my eyes
- What makes an exhibit easy to follow: labels/pictures
- What is your favorite kind of museum: science or art
- What assistive devices might be helpful: audio for those visually impaired/or who may have a hard time reading

*Post-Visit Survey*

- What did you enjoy seeing in the museum: I liked the old south photos
- What made the museum exciting for you: different types of art
- What helped you learn information in the museum: reading the descriptions
- What exhibit was easiest to follow and why: the bottom/the setup
- Did this museum change your view on museums: I will return when the exhibits change
- What assistive devices were helpful: the audio
- Was there anything you did not like/did not enjoy: It was kinda hard for a visually impaired student in some darker rooms, brighter lighting may help

**Figure 8: Case study 'Identified Typical Learner - Visit with SDAP Students'**

**Summary:**

Having a group of self-identified typical learners who attended the museum with the SDAP students was not originally part of my research plan. The fact that this group unexpectedly formed, helped my research and gave another perspective into typical learner expectations and experiences due to the typical student's learning abilities, and their understanding of SDAP student's abilities. This group is not summative of all typical students, or of those who work with persons that identify as having intellectual disabilities. This was a very small group of only three students; however, the case study can give an idea of how someone who works with persons with disabilities regularly sees museums. To summarize the study, the main points are

- ❖ Expectation: the use of audio for those who are visually impaired
- ❖ Experience: there was audio in one of the exhibits to help interact with the exhibit in a new way

- ❖ Expectation: interactive rooms
- ❖ Experience: different types of art

The overall summary of this participant's museum visit is equal in terms of expectation to experience. The biggest draw from this specific case study is the dislike of how the space was not accessibility friendly to someone who is visually impaired. Again, this point and experience stands out because it was from one of the participants who was assisting the SDAP student who was visually impaired. The participant who made these comments was a seemingly able-bodied individual. There was an understanding of accessibility by this participant that was not seen in other typical learners that participated in this research study. As for differences in expectations and experiences for this participant, they hoped there would be interactive rooms and many different mediums of art. While this participant did not say the lack of accessibility was a negative thing, it is a noted difference.

**Recommendations:**

Based on this case study, it is difficult to suggest what a museum could offer. While it is important for someone who is differently abled to have their own voice, there are times when that is not possible. In this case, it was someone working with the visually impaired participant who brought up those difficulties with the museum experience. As stated by Maxwell and Evans, "What we learn or take away from the museum visit also depends on our learning style or way of perceiving."[49] While a large piece of this study relies on the type of learner a person is, what someone perceives is heavily dependent on who a person attends a museum with. For the participant used for this case study, they noticed a difficulty that someone they were with had and made a recommendation on their behalf. Figure 9 shows that the participants in the typical learner group did not mention understanding the museum from a different perspective.

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Case study 'ASU Student - Typical Learner Group'

*Description*

The call for participants for this group of the study asked for those who do not identify as having an intellectual disability and must be between the age of 18 and 24. These students identify as being typical learners.

Date of museum visit: December 6, 2019

*Biographical Information*

- Non-SDAP Student
- Male
- Age: 23
- Visits a museum: less than once a year

*Pre-Visit Survey*

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[49] Maxwell and Evans, "Museums as Learning Settings," 3.

- Visited TCVA before: No
- What do you hope to see in a museum: I hope to see student art throughout several years and art concentrations
- What makes a museum fun and exciting: museums are fun and exciting because I love learning and I always feel like I'm engaging with the community I'm visiting
- How do you want to learn information in a museum: I want to learn information visually through posters and multimedia
- What makes an exhibit easy to follow: labels, pictures, and visual aids make an exhibit easy to follow
- What is your favorite kind of museum: art and history museums are my favorite
- What assistive devices might be helpful: A device that has more in depth information about an exhibit may be helpful

*Post-Visit Survey*

- What did you enjoy seeing in the museum: I enjoyed the refugee exhibit and the piece of a letter that the artist redacted to make it positive
- What made the museum fun and exciting: The museum experience was fun because I haven't been to an art museum in several years
- What helped you learn information in the museum: The only thing that helped me learn was the short notes describing the exhibit and pieces
- What exhibit was easiest to follow and why: the exhibit that was easiest to follow was the refugee exhibit and the metaphorical reality exhibit
- Did this museum change your views on museums: Yes it did because it reminded me why I enjoy coming to museums. I would return to this museum for a well known art exhibit or more student art
- What assistive devices were helpful: I did not use assistive devices
- Was there anything you did not like/did not enjoy: The plaques for each art piece were vague and did not provide much detail

**Figure 9: Case study 'ASU Student - Typical Learner Group'**

**Summary:**

The students that make up the typical student/general population for this study do not represent every person at Appalachian State University that identifies as a typical learner. This was a small sample of students and this case study only focuses on one student from the sample. Looking at a case study like this does, however, give an idea of what this student

hoped to see and learn at the museum, and what they actually got out of it. To summarize the

study, the main points are

- ❖ Expectation: learning through visuals and multimedia
- ❖ Experience:  learned through short notes (labels perhaps)

- ❖ Expectation: a device to help understand the art more in-depth
- ❖ Experience: not using any assistive devices during the museum visit

The overall summary of this participant's museum visit is that it was a good visit. The visit

reminded this participant why museums are important to communities. This specific

participant visits museums less than once a year, so their perspective can offer insight into

what visitors who infrequently visit museums may experience. This participant also

emphasizes student art in their responses that may have something to do with the fact that the

museum used for this study is housed on a university campus.


**Recommendations:**

Each exhibit has an exhibit guide, a binder full of artist and exhibit information,

which is typically located on a shelf within the gallery but in some cases a visitor may need

to ask a docent for it. With the increase in technology and an expectation for readily available

information from some visitors (like this research participant) a change may be needed to be

made in how this information is given to the museum visitor.  Barbara Franco writes in her

article, "Today, museums recognize that the choice is no longer theirs and that they must

change to adapt to new economic realities." [50]A recommendation for this case study would

be to make this information (artist's statement, material information, upcoming events for the

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[50] Barbara Franco, "Advocacy for Education in Museums." *The Journal of Museum Education* 35, no. 3 (2010): 229, www.jstor.org/stable/25801356.

gallery, etc.) technology based. Of course this would cost money and would require more staff for design and upkeep, but technology that could be accessed through a personal cell phone or tablet would open up the opportunity for audio (screen reading) for the visually impaired, other popular languages, virtual tour guides, interactives, and so much more.

**Case Study Findings:**

These case studies provide insight not only for Appalachian State University and the TCVA, but to other campuses and museums. The differences between the expectations and experiences between the individuals stems from what they each wanted to get out of the museum visit. The key finding between these three case studies is that the individual with the biggest difference between expectation and experience was the participant from the general population group. An assumption of why this gap exists could be one of two things. The first factor is that this individual (from the general population group) has had other museum experiences that gave them high expectations that were not met at a smaller visual arts museum. The second assumption would be that the participant from the SDAP group has had fewer positive museum experiences, so their expectations were "more realistic" to what they experienced at TCVA. While the correct answer to these assumptions is unknown, it is important to look at the possibilities as to why these findings occurred. From these case studies it seems the true difference that lies between the atypical learner and typical learner at the museum is a need for simple fixes (more interactive pieces, less reading, more guidance) for the atypical learner. Those in the typical learner group (general population) are looking for more complex or expensive changes in their expectations (more technology, a narrative explaining social change, and more multimedia). These changes would occur based on an

institution-to-institution basis, as most changes would require more staff, money, and skill

sets that some smaller museums may not have.

**Conclusion**

Conducting this research, and analyzing the results, has led me to a better understanding of what museums should do when reviewing their approach towards accessibility and inclusiveness.  Serving a community using best inclusive practices means that museums need to include and promote knowledge of various learning types and differences between museum visitors. My research looks at just that, by focusing on two groups: atypical and typical learners. These two groups are broad enough to include most people in a community. In this context, "community" includes those who visit museums, and specifically those who are located in or around Boone, North Carolina, as they are the visitors most likely to visit TCVA. If I had made the groups more specific, my research may have left out some who do not fit into these categories.

My research is important to the field of public history because it bridges the gap between physical accessibility and intellectual accessibility for visitors. It is easy for someone who self-identifies as a typical learner to forget that there are others who learn differently and that they need to be included when decisions in a museum are being made. As Shepherd points out, people with learning difficulties (atypical learners) "have the right to participate in the day-to-day activities that typify society."[51] This right was the main reason for including the SDAP students in my research. These students need to be involved in decision making processes and especially so in areas that provide services that they will specifically use and receive. As Deng writes, "...there need to be more opportunities for collaboration between the special needs community and museums because the holistic museum experience plays a vital role in cognitive and social development…"[52] Deng's point

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[51] Shepherd, "Inclusion and museums," 145.
[52] Deng, "Inclusive Museum," 6.

about collaborations opportunities reiterates the importance of my research in the field of public history and disability studies.

There are several limitations to the research I conducted that need to be acknowledged. One is the small sample size that was used for each of the three groups. The SDAP group had ten students and that number was chosen based on the number of students available in the program during the time of research. The general population sample size was five. While this was much smaller than I had hoped, those five are the only students who responded to any of my recruitment attempts. As for the third group of participants, they were an unplanned group of three as they were assisting the SDAP students on the day of the museum visit, and I was not aware they would be in attendance. This group created a good middle ground of information for the research and furthered the analysis of data.

Another limitation is that the research participants only visited one museum. Had more resources been available, such as funds for admission fees and transportation, the participants could have visited other museums, which would have allowed me to compare the visits and museum experiences. This would be an aspect of the research I would like to continue and expand upon, if given the chance, as it would greatly benefit public history sites as well as disability studies in understanding why educational institutions need to be more inclusive towards atypical learners. A third limitation in my research is that this research project only had one round of participants. Seeing the differences between the groups and the individuals would drastically increase if there was more than one round of participants. Being able to complete the research process more than once would offer more data, which would then give those using the research a more complete and cohesive answer on how to make

museums and educational institutions accessible to atypical, and in some cases typical, learners.

This research is easily adaptable and usable by other institutions and learners. The surveys can be copied or tailored to ask questions surrounding what the institution wants to learn and compare. The research is also able to be more specific. Instead of looking at atypical vs. typical learners, it could examine specific learning disabilities or even physical disabilities. This research is important in the field of public history and disability studies because it creates a foundation on how to ask important questions regarding accessibility in public history institutions. People who are historically left out of decision-making processes because of their different learning abilities do have opinions about museum visits and these opinions need to be compared to those who fall into the category of people who typically make all the decisions.

After analyzing all the surveys, it is easy to see that there are differences between the two groups. The biggest difference between the groups and the take away from this study is that atypical learners wanted basic accessibility in the museum, such as labels, guides (human tour guides or technology guides), and more understanding of what they were looking at in the museum galleries. While some of the typical learners also expected labels, most of their experiences included looking at more abstract topics and wanting more chances for out-of-the-box thinking. The original hypothesis of the research was that there would be a drastic difference between the expectations (pre-visit) and experiences (post-visit) between the two groups and that indeed was the case, but it seems that another outcome of the study was that there was a difference between the expectations and experiences within individual groups. This result leads me to believe that institutions need to look more at visitor

experiences, while simultaneously working with disability experts or even those who identify as having disabilities, both physical and intellectual. Feedback from those who identify as having a disability will increase our understanding of how people learn, and prefer to learn, in a non-formal learning environment.

Current scholarship trends involving disability inclusion within the field of public history still seems primarily focused on the physical dimensions of accessibility. Cynthia G. Falk, a professor at the Cooperstown Graduate Program, writes in "The Inclusive Historian's Handbook," "A recent Project Access white paper entitled "Beyond Ramps" appropriately asks readers to think more broadly about barriers, although the focus remains on mobility rather than sensory or cognitive disabilities."[53] Somehow the gap between physical and cognitive accessibility needs to be closed, yet even when asked to think broadly about the barriers within public history, the discussion comes back to the need for ramps, elevators, and a need to rearrange exhibit displays for easy access. While all these discussions are important, the focus on physical limitations leaves out a large group of museum visitors: visitors who identify as being atypical learners.

In terms of the museum and/or public history site being a non-formal learning environment, it is important to note that for school-aged visitors the museum may be an extension of what they are learning. This type of environment offers more accessibility to learning styles. Museums offer a different way of looking at (and interacting with) educational material and for those who are atypical learners, it benefits them in a way that sitting in a classroom does not. Perhaps these benefits come from the manipulative aspects that museums include, or having a guide walk with the visitor through each gallery

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[53] Cynthia Falk, "Accessibility," The Inclusive Historian's Handbook, last modified August 30, 2019, https://inclusivehistorian.com/accessibility/.

explaining the art or objects. *The Museum Educator's Manual*, while focusing on K-12 learners, does bring up some valid points for museums and visitors. As Laura Ferries and Anna Johnson write, "…your museum needs to have something unique to offer, something that schools cannot get elsewhere."[54] The uniqueness of objects, educational material, and accessibility is true when discussing school groups but also for those who need to experience learning in a different way.

Dierking and Falk introduce the idea of personal context at the beginning of *The Museum Experience Revisited.* This concept explains a person's experience and knowledge and includes their developmental level and how a visitor learns when they come to a museum.[55] For atypical learners the personal context may look different than that of a typical learner. The difference in personal context is why the learning environment in a museum is so important. Atypical learners learn differently and with that comes needing a different setting to learn in. Dierking and Falk argue that public historians should remember why non-formal learning environments are important and why disability study experts need to be included in design, education, and interpretation decisions. They state, "Important to physical context is assuring accessible design and inclusion for visitors with widely ranging ages, abilities (physical, reading, and so forth), levels of interest and sophistication, and learning styles."[56] Today's scholarship in accessibility needs to include more than just acknowledging physical accessibility issues, but also include learning accessibility and why the fields of public history and disability studies need to work hand-in-hand. These discussions need to include both atypical and typical learners as both of these groups experience learning through

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[54] Johnson, et al., *Museum* Educators, 120.
[55] Falk and Dierking, *Museum Experience Revisited*, 33.
[56] Falk and Dierking, *Museum Experience Revisited*, 128.

museum visits. My research adds to this discussion as it showcases what those experiences

look like and how it affects both atypical and typical learners.

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**Appendix A**

Thesis Research for Rebekkah Watkins - Appalachian State University Graduate Student

# FOR YOUR PRIVACY - DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS PACKET

**Before the visit** (in the classroom)
- Get a packet and complete the pre-visit survey.

**Walk to the TCVA and take a museum tour.**
- Hold onto your packet.
- You could take notes on the Museum Notes pages in your packet.
- You do not HAVE to take notes while touring the museum.

**After the visit** (at the TCVA)
- Complete the post-visit survey.
- Give packet to Rebekkah and go to the next thing on your daily schedule.

If you have any questions please reach out to me:
watkinsrl1@appstate.edu
402-763-7319

*Information regarding Exempt Research can be found at:*
*https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects-irb/irb-forms*

Thesis Research for Rebekkah Watkins - Appalachian State University Graduate Student

# FOR YOUR PRIVACY - DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS PACKET

We are asking you to complete this survey for research. You do not have to complete it if you decide not to. Your answers will be anonymous--we will not be able to trace them back to you.

We are asking you to do these activities for research. [Attend a museum and explore the exhibits. Before you visit you will fill out a survey about your expectations of the museum. During your visit you will fill out notes and a rubric of your visit. After your museum visit you will fill out a survey in regards to your experience.] You don't have to finish them if you decide you don't want to. [Yes you will/have completed the activities or No you will not/have not completed the activities] Your responses will be anonymous--we will not be able to trace them back to you. Your data will be stored through the use of a packet you are assigned. That packet will be given at the beginning of the activity and handed back when the activity is finished. All packets will be stored in a confidential folder.

Once the research is complete, all materials will be disposed of in university shredding/recycling.

If you have any questions please reach out to me:
watkinsrl1@appstate.edu
402-763-7319

*Information regarding Exempt Research can be found at:*
*https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects-irb/irb-forms*

# Biographical Information

**Are you in the Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program?**

**Yes** **No**

**Age _____**

**Gender _____**

**How often do you visit a museum? (check one)**

- First time
- Once a month
- 1 or more times every six months
- Less than once a year
- Other_____

# Pre-Visit Survey

Have you ever been to the TCVA before? (circle one)

Yes          No

What do you hope to see at the museum?

_____
_____

What makes a museum fun and exciting for you?

_____
_____

How do you want to learn information in a museum?

_____
_____

What makes an exhibit easy to follow? Labels, pictures, audio, etc?

_____
_____

What is your favorite kind of museum? Art, history, science, etc?

_____
_____

What assistive devices might be helpful when attending a museum?

_____
_____

Museum Visit Notes
**OPTIONAL**

Museum:
Date:

| | |
|---|---|
| What exhibit room was your favorite and why? | |
| What helped you learn most in the exhibit? ex: label, activity, conversation with peer or staff member? | |
| What area of the museum was the most difficult to learn in and why? | |
| Any additional comments on the overall experience of the museum visit. | |

**OPTIONAL**

| I am enjoying… | I learned a lot about... |
|---|---|
| I really like exhibits with:<br><br>• Labels<br>• Audio<br>• Exhibit descriptions<br>• Pictures<br>• When staff explained the exhibit<br>• When I talk with peers about the artwork<br>• Other_____ | What types of assistive tech did you use? |

# Additional Notes
## OPTIONAL

# Post-Visit Survey

Was this your first time visiting the TCVA? (circle one)

Yes        No

What did you enjoy seeing at the museum?
_____
_____

What made the museum fun and exciting for you?
_____
_____

What helped you learn information at the museum? Was it a person?
_____
_____

What exhibit was easiest to follow and why? Labels, pictures, audio, etc?
_____
_____

Did this museum visit change your views on museums? What would make you return to this museum?
_____
_____
_____

What assistive devices were helpful when attending the museum?
_____
_____

Was there anything about this museum that you did not like/did not enjoy?
_____
_____
_____

**Appendix B**

**Appendix C**

# What's up in the Galleries
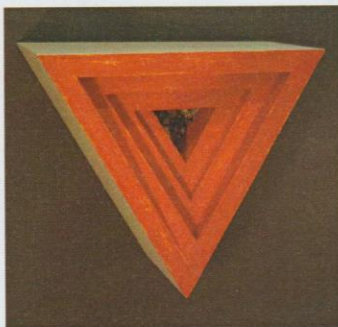


### Mayer Gallery
**Metaphorical Reality: Keith Bryant**
September 6 – February 1, 2020
Keith Bryant creates work from a place that exists beyond the confines of language yet enhances the realm of understanding riddles in life, connection and independence. Working in wood, metals and ceramics, his forms employ abstraction metaphor. Bryant's sculptures address ideas of loneliness, isolation, architecture and landscape.
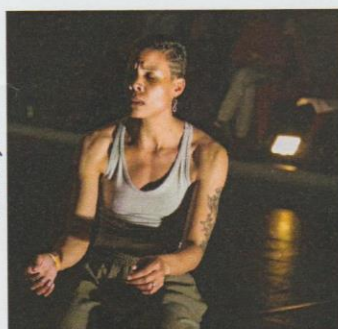


### Gallery A
**My Place or Yours? Cara Hagan, Guest Curator**
June 7 – December 7
My Place, or Yours? is an exploration into the politics and practice of collaborative work. The artists in this exhibition have all arrived with the goal of making work together, albeit from a distance. More specifically, the majority of the participants here have embarked on a journey through the philosophy and practice of "artistic surrogacy."
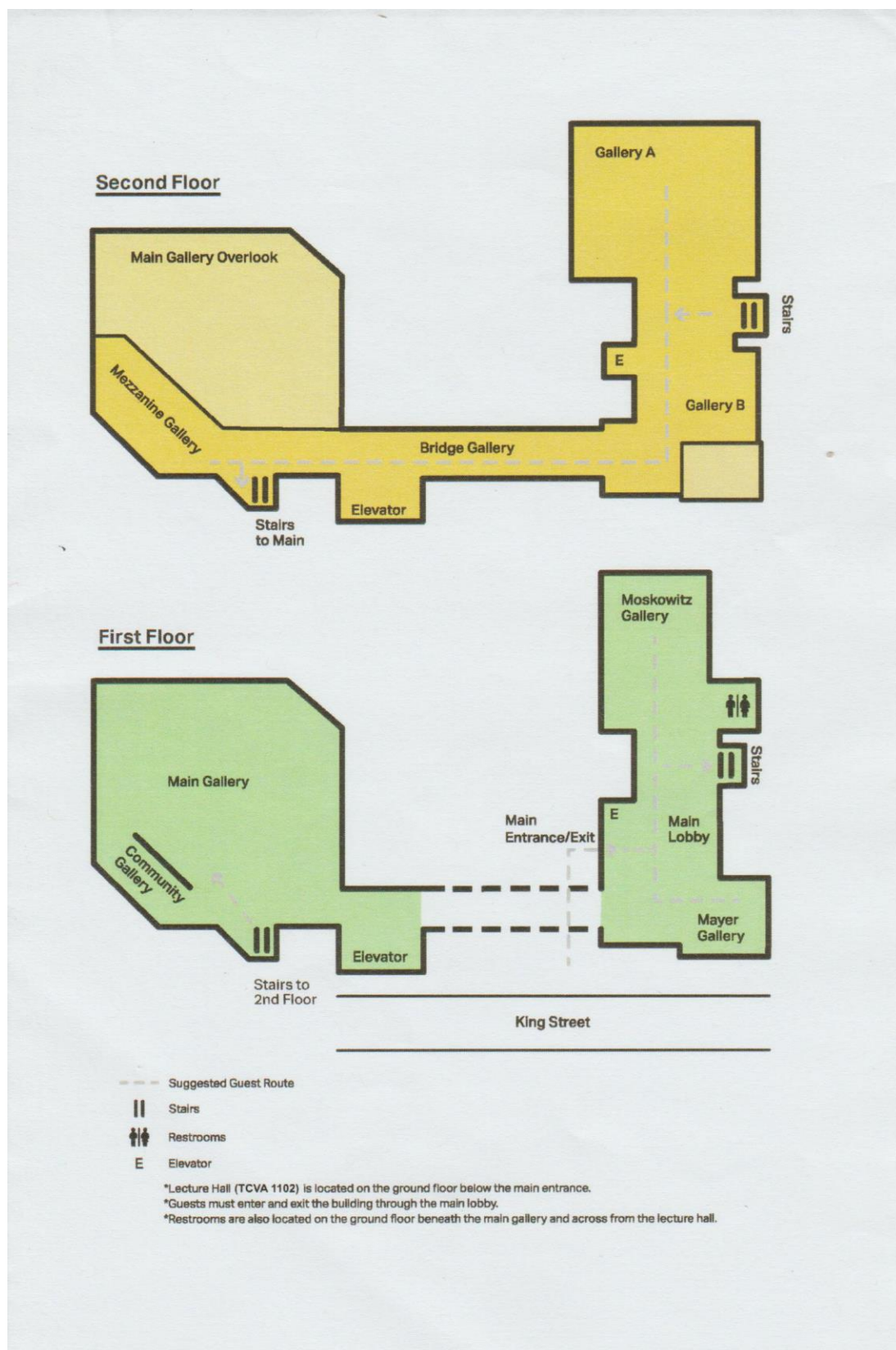


### Gallery B
**Refugee: Bill Brown**
June 7 – December 7
According to the Global Citizen there are an estimated 25.4 million refugees worldwide and the UN Refugee Agency reports that over 52% of refugees are children. Regionally beloved sculptor and philanthropist, Bill Brown, wanted to do something to help relieve this international crisis and turned to what he knows best—creating his Refugee Series. Each freestanding metal piece in the series begins with a figurative form perched on a platform that metaphorically references the refugee journey: a rocking boat, an isolated rooftop, a beloved homeland.

**Artists' Works Pictured:**
Keith Bryant, Cara Hagan, Bill Brown, Michelle Van Parys, Jodi Woodward, Steve Lotz, Gretchen Lotz

**Second Floor**

Gallery A

Main Gallery Overlook

Stairs

E

Mezzanine Gallery

Gallery B

Bridge Gallery

Elevator

Stairs
to Main

---

**First Floor**

Moskowitz
Gallery

Stairs

Main Gallery

E

Main
Lobby

Main
Entrance/Exit

Community
Gallery

Mayer
Gallery

Elevator

Stairs to
2nd Floor

King Street

- - - Suggested Guest Route

|| Stairs

Restrooms

E Elevator

*Lecture Hall (TCVA 1102) is located on the ground floor below the main entrance.
*Guests must enter and exit the building through the main lobby.
*Restrooms are also located on the ground floor beneath the main gallery and across from the lecture hall.

**Mezzanine Gallery**

### Mezzanine Gallery

**Beyond the Plantations:
Images of the New South,
Photographs by Michelle Van Parys**

July 5 – February 1, 2020

Images of the Old South are often sanitized views of a perfect and prosperous plantation life yet ignore the conflict, conquest, and transformation that is manifested in the changing landscape. Van Parys' photographs present the contemporary southern landscape in all of its rich complexity.



**Community Gallery**
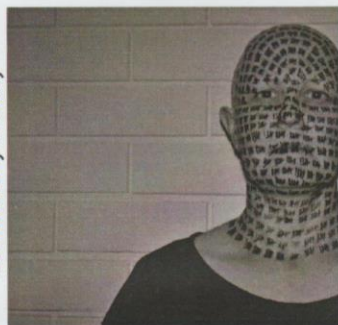
### Community Gallery

**1,2,3,4,5....A site-specific installation
by Jodi Woodward**

July 5 – February 1, 2020

The artist asks viewers to reflect on how they (we) choose to spend the time we are given in our lives. She repeatedly asks: "Do we just tick over the days or do we actively reflect on what we do and why we do it? Do we just repeat the same behaviors over and over or do we choose to change what we do, or behave differently?"



**Main Gallery**

### Main Gallery

**Let the Circle Be Unbroken:
Steve & Gretchen Lotz**

July 5 – December 7

Gretchen and Steve Lotz continue to inspire, challenge, and find mystery in each other after nearly five decades of an aesthetically inspired partnership. The intertwined worlds they have fashioned find form in the organically entangled artworks they create. Steve's paintings are inspired by the colors of the deep sea-- watery greens, misty blues, rich coral purples and spiny reds. Gretchen too finds inspiration in the creatures of the waters and the birds of the skies.

### Exhibitions coming in January, 2020
**Lian, Lian: Hui Chi Lee
Fine & Applied Art Faculty Biennial**

# Community Art Workshops

## Workshops for Kids

**Blazings Easels:** Ages 7-12, Fridays, 3 - 4:30 pm. September - November
$24/month or $60/3 months
**Creative Kids Studio:** Ages 5-12, 1 - 2 pm, $5/class
Select Saturdays: Sept 14, Oct 12, Nov 9
*Registration and fee is required. Visit tcva.org/workshops for additional information.*

## Adult Workshops

**Inkalicious: Alcohol Inks:** Alternate Fridays, Sept - Nov, 9 am - 12 pm
**Tai Chi:** Tuesdays, 5 - 6 pm, Sept 3 - Nov 19
**Visual Journaling:** Tuesdays, 6:30 - 8:30 pm, Sept 3 - Nov 19
*Visit tcva.org/workshops for more information including schedule and fees.*

## Appalachian Student Workshops - the above adult workshops plus:

**Paint Night:** Select Mondays Sept - Nov, 6:30 pm - 8:30pm FREE
**Open Studio:** Thursdays, 6 - 8 pm, Sept 5 - Nov 21 FREE
Workshops are FREE for all Appalachian State University Students

# Free Fall Events

**ARTtalks** at the Turchin Lecture Hall, 6 pm
Oct 23 - **Cara Hagan + artists**: My Place, or Yours?
Nov 6 - **Keith Bryant**: Form from Feelings

**Upcoming First Friday Art Crawls in Downtown Boone,** 6 - 9 pm
November 1 and December 6, 2019. There is no First Friday Art Crawl in January

**Rosen Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition**
Pick up a map for the self-guided tour!

# Mark Your Calendar!

**Spring Exhibition Celebration!**
March 6, 6 - 10 pm
> Celebrate new exhibitions, meet the artists, enjoy live music, refreshments
> and a cash bar.

**Spring ARTtalks** at the Turchin Lecture Hall, 6 pm
March 4 - **Lesia Maruschak:** MARIA
April 1 - **Hui Chi Lee:** Lian, Lian

**Appendix D**

**Appalachian**
STATE UNIVERSITY

**To:** Rebekkah Watkins
History
CAMPUS EMAIL

**From:** Robin Tyndall, IRB Administrator
**Date:** 10/11/2019
**RE:** Notice of IRB Exemption

**STUDY #:** 20-0074
**STUDY TITLE:** The Comparative Museum Experience of Atypical and Typical Learners

**Exemption Category:** 2.Survey, interview, public observation

This study involves minimal risk and meets the exemption category cited above. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and University policy and procedures, the research activities described in the study materials are exempt from further IRB review.

**Vita**

Rebekkah Watkins was born in Colorado, United States. She graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2018 with a Bachelor of Journalism with a second major in Classics and Religious Studies (classics emphasis) and a minor in History. The following fall, she began her master's program in History at Appalachian State University and began her studies toward a Master of Arts degree in Public History with a concentration in Museum Studies. The M.A. was awarded in May 2020.

During the summer of 2019 Rebekkah lived in Washington D.C. as she was the Programs and Development Intern at the Newseum and Freedom Forum Institute. She has also served as an intern at the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum and the University of Nebraska Foundation. Over her two years at Appalachian State University, Rebekkah was heavily involved in academic endeavors of underclassman as she worked as a graduate assistant for the Student Support Services (SSS) and Appalachian Commitment to a College Education for Student Success (ACCESS) programs. Positions she held were academic coach, mentor, secondary instructor, and lead graduate assistant.

Miss Watkins served as President of the Graduate Student Government Association as well as the President of Graduate History Student Association during the 2019-2020 school year.