

University Art Galleries Marketing Focus Groups Spring 2016

Background

According to its website (<http://uart.tamu.edu/mission>) “The University Art Galleries Department (UART) supports the educational mission of Texas A&M University by providing impactful visual arts experiences to diverse campus and regional community audiences.” In February 2016, University Art Galleries contacted Student Life Studies to assist in assessing the Texas A&M University (TAMU) student community’s perceptions of the University Art Galleries’ programs, exhibitions and special events and get student input on marketing. This is the first time that University Art Galleries has worked with Student Life Studies on this project.

Method and Sample

The focus group protocol and questions were designed by staff within the University Art Galleries and Student Life Studies. Two student focus groups were held; one was facilitated by staff members from both departments on March 23, 2016 and the other, held on April 14, 2016 was facilitated by staff from the University Art Galleries alone. The focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed by student employees within Student Life Studies.

Student participation in the focus groups was solicited by the University Art Galleries staff in cooperation with faculty from the College of Architecture who offered extra credit to students to participate in the focus groups. University Art Galleries’ staff and Student Life Studies staff also solicited participants from students within close proximity of the focus group locations immediately before the start time of the focus groups. Four students participated in the March focus group and 10 students participated in the April focus group.

Immediately before beginning the focus group, the participants were asked to fill out a small survey. The survey was created using Teleform[®], a software program that creates scannable paper surveys and databases. It contained four quantitative questions. The survey data was analyzed using SPSS[®], a statistical software package, and the focus group data analyzed using Microsoft Word[®]. All 14 focus group participants were given the survey and 12 completed it, resulting in an 86% response rate.

Results

The survey results include frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations (sd) for the number of people (n) who responded to the questions. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Focus group question responses were analyzed in a formal content analysis conducted by Student Life Studies and University Art Galleries staff to identify main themes that were presented by the participants. This report presents the qualitative themes developed from the analysis. The complete interview transcripts can be found in separate documents. This report is divided into three sections, Survey Responses, March 23rd Focus Group and April 14th Focus Group.

Survey Responses

Participants were asked if they had previously heard of the Stark Galleries. All 12 respondents indicated they had previously heard of the Stark Galleries. They were then asked if they had previously heard of the Forsyth Galleries. Of the 11 who responded, 91% said yes and 9% said no. When asked if they had ever been into the Galleries, 67% of the 12 respondents said that they had visited both the Stark and Forsyth Galleries. Seventeen percent (17%) indicated visiting only the Stark Galleries and eight percent (8%) indicated having only visited the Forsyth Galleries. Another eight percent (8%) indicated that they had never been into either the Stark or Forsyth Galleries.

The last question on the survey asked the focus group participants how often they have visited museums. Twelve answered and 42% responded they visit occasionally, once or more every three months. Thirty-three percent (33%) said they visit often, once or more per month and 25% stated they rarely visit museums, once or twice per year. No one selected the option of having never been to a museum.

March 23rd Focus Group

The focus group opened with asking which social media platforms the participants used frequently and how, and then asked how they engaged with companies or brands using social media. The participants talked about using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. In describing how they use Twitter they mentioned looking at feeds once a day, the timeline, or checking it “a lot” but not necessarily engaging in tweets themselves. A few were amused with companies who go on Twitter and engage with them. When mentioning Facebook and how they used it, the students talked about getting coupons from brands and companies, and other information. They also mentioned using Instagram, interacting with it and checking it because it has an A&M page. The participants also mentioned using Snapchat frequently to communicate with students, and checking the TAMU campus story.

The students were then asked about whether they follow on-campus social media accounts, which ones and why. Reveille’s page on Twitter, TAMU’s page and the Yell Leaders page on Instagram, and the TAMU campus story on Snapchat were mentioned. Most followed these accounts because they found them entertaining, especially pictures (specifically of Reveille). When asked what they looked for in a brand or company’s social media account, the participants said cool, entertaining pictures, frequent updates, interactive stories and people tripping or getting hurt in a funny way.

The next questions asked the students about their perceptions of the University Art Galleries and improvements that could be made to improve student engagement with the Galleries. They were asked what would attract their friends to the Galleries, and they mentioned a wine night, making them more relatable to students’ interests and holding events. Also mentioned was the perceived attitude of the students working in the Galleries; it seemed that they looked mad so it made the Gallery unapproachable. As well, they said that students not really having free time prevented them from visiting. When asked what they would like to see on display in the Galleries, the participants mentioned modern work, and interactive displays.

The focus group participants were then asked for their opinions regarding some ideas that the Galleries’ staff expressed to engage more students with the Art Galleries. One idea presented was starting something imitating the Humans of New York platform, having people walking into the Galleries with the people that create the art and documenting that on social media. Would that be something the students would share, look at or care about? The participants thought it would be interesting, and if someone was there they would try to participate. Another mentioned it might help

reduce the exclusive vibe of the upstairs Galleries, as they felt that only certain groups were allowed in and that it was not open to students in general. Another idea presented to the focus group was a video series on what art is; a series of clips that define terms and different movements that students might not know. The students liked the idea of clips about the pieces, and art terms and one suggested using Instagram for short, fast clips and to advertise it and the Galleries on social media.

The participants were asked to provide their ideas regarding the ambiance of the Galleries and how the spaces could be made more welcoming to students. The participants shared quite a few ideas, such as training the student workers to be friendlier, play music in the Galleries, and provide places to hang out (couches, electrical outlets), offer coffee and have signage that invites students to the Galleries. Others recommended giving guided tours, holding intercultural art events as well as the interactive displays mentioned previously, and sometimes display art created by TAMU students.

April 14th Focus Group

The April 14th focus group participants were asked a different series of questions than the March 23rd focus group, and most inquired about participants' perceptions and preferences for receiving information about campus events, their use of social media and the interaction of receiving information and social media. The first question asked about the ways that the participants received information about things going on around campus. Email, in classes, walking by and their phones were their responses. When asked the best ways to receive information, their answers were similar, although included social media (accessed through their phones). The participants then indicated that the social media platforms they use most frequently were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat.

The participants were then asked to share what actually attracted them to events on campus. Free food, free speakers and easy access to an event (not having to go get a ticket to attend). When asked if social media plays a role in attending on-campus events and if they follow any on-campus social media accounts, the participants answered affirmatively, indicating on-campus Facebook accounts, like *The Battalion*'s page. Others mentioned Instagram (pictures), Snapchat, specifically the TAMU campus story, and Twitter, especially when feeds are "blowing up" about events on and off campus.

Lastly the participants were asked about how they would attract their friends to the Galleries, and what would they like to see if the Galleries put in a lounge area. Participants suggested involving professors and their classes; giving tours or attending a visiting artist's event as well as holding interesting events that are directly advertised to them. Regarding the lounge area, most seemed favorable, as long as it has comfortable seating, electrical outlets and coffee tables for lap tops.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The students participating in the focus groups shared their perceptions of the Galleries, how they used social media and their preference for outreach regarding campus events. Some shared ideas to improve student access to the Galleries, such as creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere through welcoming student workers, signage, and offering a comfortable lounge area to hang out. Participants thought more interactive exhibits and displays, and well-advertised events, as well as collaborations with academic classes would also entice more students to visit the Galleries. If not already implemented or under consideration, University Art Galleries staff may want to review these ideas and analyze their plausibility, including further assessment with a wider range of students on-campus.

The participants also indicated being active on social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter and engaging with campus resources using these platforms. As some mentioned already following TAMU campus pages and accounts within these platforms, University Art Galleries staff may want to consider collaborating with some of these or other existing TAMU sponsors to advertise the Galleries' exhibits and events, in effort to reach students who may be interested in visiting the Galleries.

Reading through the transcripts for specific comments from the participants is recommended to gain a full understanding of their feedback and suggestions. Sharing the results with stakeholders both within and outside the department as well as with the student community is also encouraged.

Report Prepared for: Amanda Dyer, University Art Galleries
Report Prepared by: Susan Fox-Forrester, Student Life Studies
Survey Designed by: Tyler Harkrider, Student Life Studies
Analysis Prepared by: Susan Fox-Forrester, Student Life Studies
Prepared on: August 26, 2016

*Services provided by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by Texas A&M University Advancement Fee.
Find Student Life Studies on Facebook!*