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RUTGERS CAMDEN CENTER FOR THE ARTS AUDIENCE STUDY

by  
Meridith Auerbach

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the  
Masters of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division of Rowan University  
May 2001

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Don Bagin, Ph.D

Date Approved May 29, 01

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### Abstract

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Uncle Barry (The computer has gotten good use for the past two years.)

Dr. Don Bagin

Renee Post

Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts

Mark Fields

Maureen, Maryfrances, Kelly, and Vicki

Annette McCully

The Willow Staff 2000-2001

The PR Savvy Crew

## ABSTRACT

**Auerbach, Meridith D.** Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts Audience Analysis, 2001.  
Advisor: Dr. Donald Bagin  
Public Relations

The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts strives to serve the regional community with diverse types of programming and to promote a love for the performing arts. The center wants to program events people are interested in attending. Audience likes and dislikes need to be studied and considered when choosing events for a season. The audience's opinion is important because they bring in revenue and therefore play a key role in the success of a theater.

There are factors that may persuade people to attend programs at the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts. Likewise, audiences may have negative perceptions as well. The main goal of this study was to understand what would make an audience member feel welcome and bonded with the center and its staff. Reaching out to audience members and asking their opinions will help the center establish a program fitting their wants.

This thesis studies the importance of the audience to a theater. The survey was designed to examine the demographic information of audience members of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts. The information was obtained through a mailing to people on the center's mailing list. The audience shared their thoughts about the center and their programming wants for future events. The summary of answers and recommendations made by the author will assist the staff of the Rutgers Camden Center of the Arts to better serve their clientele.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

**Auerbach, Meridith D.** Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts Audience Analysis,  
2001.  
Advisor: Dr. Donald Bagin  
Public Relations

The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts strives to serve the regional community with diverse types of programming. The main goal of this study was to understand what would make an audience member feel welcome and bonded with the center and its staff. The survey was designed to examine the demographic information of audience members of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts and their programming wants for future events. It provides recommendations for the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts to better serve their clientele.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts (RCCA) was formed in 1997 when the Stedman Gallery and the Walter K. Gordon Theater came together under one name to promote the love of the arts. The Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts is located on the Camden Campus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. “Visual arts and cultural heritage exhibitions are shown in the Stedman's Main Gallery and Gallery II. The Gordon Theater hosts live music, dance, and theater performances, in addition to repertory films. Programs for K-12 schools include on-site museum and performing arts education programs as well as distance learning programs. RCCA's service to the community includes programs designed to serve the children of Camden, such as *Shared Visions*, *Shared Rhythms*, and *Art Soup!*”<sup>1</sup>

The mission statement of the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts is “to serve the regional community with an ongoing program of exhibitions, performances, events, and educational activities that promote a full understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the arts.” Over the past four years, since the center was established, the RCCA has been presenting programming that include all types of interests.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.Rutgers.edu](http://www.Rutgers.edu)

The RCCA is currently involved in a five-year plan that includes the following goals:

- to create an ongoing calendar of innovative programs, which present the arts in ways that are meaningful and accessible to the public—programs that excite the imagination, promote lifelong learning, and provide opportunities to interact with the arts and with artists;
- to establish strategic programming partnerships that will significantly enhance our ability to serve the needs of Camden City and the larger region;
- to conduct innovative community impact programs that infuse the arts into public spaces and urban neighborhoods;
- while continuing our focus on Camden City children and youth, to emerge as a center for K-12 arts education and enrichment, with on-site arts and cultural programs, resources for artist-educators, and a model distance-learning program that interweaves arts education programs delivered 1) on-site, 2) through video-conferencing, and 3) via the internet;
- to renovate and expand our facilities, creating a dramatic new environment with updated technical systems that support the highest quality art productions and presentations and provide the fullest artistic experience for our patrons;
- to attract an active, involved constituency, and form a strong network of support committees, friends, groups, and volunteers;
- to achieve a more secure financial base by conducting a capital campaign to build an operating endowment and to expend our base of annually contributed income by developing sources of earned income.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Purpose and Scope of Grant Request, Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts



One of the constituents of the five-year plan is “to attract an active, involved constituency, and form a strong network of support committees, friends, groups, and volunteers.” The Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts is interested in determining what their audiences think, to better serve and design programming for their clientele. In addition to serving this existing customer base, they wish to reach out to new prospective audiences. “Can theatre [art] exist without an audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is clear that the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts relies on their audiences just as much as their audience looks to them for programming.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Bennett, Theatre Audiences, Great Britain, 1990, p. 3. (Grotowski 1968: 32).

### Statement of the Problem

While the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts has a mailing list of more than 6,000 people, they have not conducted an audience survey and received feedback about their facility or programs.

The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts began compiling the mailing list six years ago. The mailing list is comprised of Rutgers-Camden alumni and people that show an interest in receiving information. It is believed that the mailing list may be outdated with many people having moved or passed away in the past few years.

The audience opinion is important because the audience is what brings the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts its revenue. By getting a better understanding of audience wants and needs, the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts will be able to program more effectively, persuade its current audience to return and attract new audience members.

Art which does not generate audiences will seldom generate revenues, whether from box office receipts or funding bodies and sponsors. The development of audiences is therefore a fundamental responsibility of the marketing function. In practice, this means that the main task of arts marketing is to motivate people to attend performances ...encouraging them to share in the artist experience being provided.<sup>4</sup>

To do this effectively, Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts must understand the needs, desires, and motivations of all these people who are, or could be, attendees at their events or venues.

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Hill, Catherine O'Sullivan, Terry O'Sullivan, Creative Arts Marketing, Great Britain, 1998.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study will provide the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts information from their audience base so that they may better program and cater to the needs of their audience. By reaching out to current audience members there is the possibility of gaining new audience interest.

Renee Post, Marketing Director for the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts states:

In terms of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts, we have no audience research except for very generic information. We are looking to see what our audience members want and why they do or do not attending programming. The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts needs to build a satisfied audience base. In order to do this, we must first find out what our current audience thinks. We want and need to generate more revenue than we are spending.<sup>5</sup>

### **Importance of the Study**

The mission of the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts states that they wish to serve the regional community throughout the year with exhibitions, performances, films, events, and arts education programs that promote a full appreciation and enjoyment of the arts and an understanding of their connection to all facets of life.<sup>6</sup>

The Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts is a fairly young organization that was started under that name three years ago. They have only a basic understanding of their audience and they are interested in being able to better serve their clientele in terms of programming. If the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts is able to better serve the clientele they already have, they may be able to expand their audience.

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<sup>5</sup> Renee Post, Marketing Director of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts

<sup>6</sup> [www.Rutgers.edu](http://www.Rutgers.edu)

### **Definition of Terms**

**Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts:** name for the newly merged Stedman Gallery and Gordon Theater.

**audience:** the spectators or listeners assembled at a performance or art show.

**Gordon Theater:** the theater that is part of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts.

**Stedman Gallery:** the art gallery that is part of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This study was limited to the 500-person sample that was randomly selected from the audience database. Some of the addresses were incorrect and therefore the survey would not reach the person for whom it was intended.

### **Plan of Study**

A survey was developed and distributed to the mailing list of Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts. By surveying the members of the mailing list, the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts will assess what type of programming the members are most interested in and what they would like to see in the future.

The study focused mainly on the Gordon Theater. The exhibits at the Stedman Gallery are free to the viewing public and the Gordon Theater is what brings in all of the revenue. While the author was interested in what audience thoughts were about the Stedman Gallery, by narrowing the survey to include only the Gordon Theater, the RCCA will learn what type of programs their audience base is interested in.

## Chapter 2

### Research

This chapter reviews selected literature related to theater and the study of audiences. Literature available for this analysis includes books written about theater, books written about surveys, and literature made available by the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts. The key words that were used as the subject were “theater,” “audiences,” “theater audiences,” and non-profit theaters.”

To understand theater audiences today, it is important to look at the history of theater audiences. The book Theater Audiences explains the importance of an audience to a performance. In the 1800s there were many changes to the architecture of the theaters. While older structures lent themselves to the audiences becoming rowdy and excited, the new buildings were built for the audiences to be sedate and passive. It was during this time that the playwrights outwardly began to recognize the audience as a reason for being successful and those for whom they were ultimately writing. The audience kept the theaters open and supported the costs of sets, props, costumes, and a variety of other necessities. The audience continued to be the reason for the arts.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Bennett, Theatre Audiences, Great Britain, 1990, p. 3.

Personal interviews were done as part of the research for the study. The author spoke with Renee Post, Marketing Manager at the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts and Virginia Oberlin Steel, Director of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts. The interviews included discussion about what was known about their audience base and what they would like to find out through the survey.

Renee Post expressed the need for an audience survey so in the future she would know her target audience and the effective ways of contacting those people. Ultimately, the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts wants to generate more revenue than they are spending.<sup>2</sup>

Mark Fields' thesis, Subscribe Then! What now? a study of performing arts communication and its relation to current corporate trends, was beneficial to the writing of this thesis because Fields wrote about the future of performing arts and how trends factor into the attendance of audience members.<sup>3</sup> The author had the opportunity to interview Mark Fields and get his insight and ideas about public relations in conjunction with the performing arts.

Fields' received thirty-one responses to the survey he sent to marketing/public relations directors in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. While the author's study focuses on the audience and their attitude about the Rutgers Camden Center for the arts, Fields focused on those disseminating information to their audiences.

In his survey, Fields asked for those being surveyed to react to the statement, "Research is a luxury in a limited budget." Over half of the people who were surveyed

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<sup>2</sup> Renee Post, Marketing Director of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts

<sup>3</sup> Mark Fields, Subscribe Then! What now? a study of performing arts communication and its relation to current corporate trends, thesis for Rowan University, Public Relations Graduate Program, 1993.

(67%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. However, 84% agreed with the statement, “Research should be an integral part of the annual marketing/public relations budget.” Fields also inquired where their marketing/public relations ideas came from for their theaters and what types of resources they had to use. The author found this thesis helpful because it closely correlated with the work the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts was trying to do.<sup>4</sup>

The Audience, a book written by Herbert Blau, starts with a quote from popular playwright, Virginia Woolf. “No audience. No echo. That’s part of one’s death.” The importance of the audience is stressed in this book. The Audience relays the absolute necessity of a strong audience for a performance to be successful. Performers enjoy sharing their art with an audience and the feedback that they receive from audience members. As Woolf writes, without the audience feedback, it is “part of one’s death.”<sup>5</sup>

How to Conduct Your Own Survey, by Salant and Dillman, provided helpful insight to the author when constructing questions and structure for the survey. The sections that provided the most help were entitled “Writing Good Questions” and “Questionnaire Design.”<sup>6</sup>

Hill, O’Sullivan, and O’Sullivan, in Creative Arts Marketing, reveal many tricks of the trade dealing with audiences and designing questionnaires that were very helpful for the purpose of this study. “An audience can also be thought of as comprising all those with whom an individual or organization has some form of communication. For an arts organization, this may include all those who support the arts in any way, or who have an

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Fields, Subscribe Then! What now? a study of performing arts communication and its relation to current corporate trends, thesis for Rowan University, Public Relations Graduate Program, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Blau, The Audience, Baltimore, MD, 1990. p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Priscilla Salant, Don A. Dillman, How To Conduct Your Own Survey, United States, 1994, p. 77-135.

interest in their development.”<sup>7</sup> This thought process describes how the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts thinks of their audience. The RCCA’s mailing list includes people who may have not attended a performance in over a year, but at one point expressed an interest. The authors of Creative Arts Marketing quote R.J. Schlosser in their book, “The theatre invests money, time and artistic commitment to give the audience pleasure. The audience invests money and time in support of the theatre. It also invests emotional commitment.”<sup>8</sup>

The authors of Creative Arts Marketing also examine why there are certain barriers to arts attendance. There are a variety of reasons why people do not feel comfortable attending arts programs. Hill, O’Sullivan, and O’Sullivan have done research on why there is a resistance to the arts and what underlying beliefs people have towards certain events.

Resistance to the arts by non-attenders has been shown to be underpinned by a variety of beliefs and attitudes towards participation in the arts. Those who rarely or never participate gave some practical reasons why they don’t go, such as the availability of transport and the costs involved and cultural reasons included lack of interest amongst family and friends and lack of education in the arts. (p. 34)<sup>7</sup>

This is important when studying audience participation and attendance to events because arts centers need to break down the barriers that are keeping potential customers away. This is discussed in chapter four when the author looks at the reasons why people do not attend Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts programming.

When considering what type of questions to include on the survey being sent out, suggestions that were made by Renee Post were helpful. Suggestions in Creative Arts

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Hill, Catherine O’Sullivan, Terry O’Sullivan, Creative Arts Marketing, Great Britain, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> R.J. Schlosser, *Market the Arts!* 87-98, Foundation for the Extension and Development of the American Professional Theatre, 1983.



Marketing, were also very helpful. The authors of Creative Arts Marketing had many good ideas about getting basic necessities. The authors explain the importance of obtaining demographic information from their clientele.

This is primarily concerned with identifying the nature, composition and preference of current and potential audiences. It is commonly used to help organizations identify audience groupings (or market segments) with similar characters and arts preferences, enabling visitor or audience profiles to be constructed for different types of exhibitions or performances. An audience survey will typically ask for details of demographic characteristics including age and sex, but also income, occupation, education, and perhaps means of transport and distance traveled to the venue. This type of information helps galleries and theatres to target their future programs, events, promotional literature, fund-raising and advertising more precisely, and it can provide useful quantified information when negotiating sponsorship. (p. 57)<sup>9</sup>

In Search of an Audience by Bradley G. Morison and Kay Fliehr was informative to read because it shared the story of how the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota was able to raise attendance by over 30 thousand people in three years. The book shared inside information about how one theater was able to expand its audience base. In relation to this thesis, the theater had an in-house survey at each performance for audience members to fill out. The structure and content of these in-house surveys are similar in nature to the survey used in this study. Unlike this study, however, these surveys conducted by the Guthrie Theater were being used to check the accuracy of a previously published report. In the RCCA study, no such previous report exists.

The reason for the research was evident: to check the accuracy of the guesses in the Morison Report and to find out whom we had reached with the theatre's story in terms of age, sex, geographical location of home, occupation, education, and other data. Even more important, we hoped to discover those whom we had *not* reached so that we could go to work on them the following season. (p. 27)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Hill, Catherine O'Sullivan, Terry O'Sullivan, Creative Arts Marketing, Great Britain, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Bradley G Morison, Kay Fliehr, In Search of an Audience: How an Audience Was Found for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, New York, 1968.

The survey was included in the book as well as an analysis of the audience answers. Many of the questions that were asked were helpful to the author when creating the survey questions for the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts. The questions asked to the audience members of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre were:

*Question 1: Where is your current home?*

*Question 2a: What is the price of your seat?*

*Question 2b: [What] Type of ticket bought?*

*Question 2c: How was it (the ticket) purchased?*

*Question 3: What is your approximate age?*

*Question 4a: And are you male or female?*

*Question 4b: And are you married or unmarried?*

*Question 4c: If married, are you with your husband or wife?*

*Question 5: Which one these classifications best describes your present occupation, business or profession? (student, housewife, retired, professional, business, sales clerk, craftsman, technical, farmer, not employed, other)*

*Question 6: What is the last grade in school you completed?*

*Question 7: Last year (1962), did you attend any plays, other than high school class plays, but including musical comedies, local theatre groups, etc.?*

*Question 7b: (If plays... were attended in 1962, ask: )*

*Approximately how many did you attend?*

*Question 7c: (If plays... were attended in 1962, ask: )*

*About how many of these were in Minneapolis or St. Paul?*

*Question 8: Last year (1962) did you attend any of the following kinds of attractions... symphony concerts, pro baseball games, operas, pro football games, ballets, or jazz concerts? Which?*

*Question 9a: How are you enjoying today's performance- extremely well, very well, fairly well, not too well, or not at all?*

*Question 9b: How does this compare with what you expected: Better, about the same, or not as well?*

*Question 10: When the season is over, how many of the four plays do you expect you will have seen?<sup>11</sup>*

The plan of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre was to make people feel comfortable with attending the theater and increase the excitement level of those people attending. Word of mouth went a long way for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre and the author hopes that this applies to the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts as well.

The literature available indicates the importance of the audience to any theater. To keep an audience happy, it is important to communicate with them and see what their wants are, enticing them to attend performances.

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<sup>11</sup> Bradley G Morison, Kay Fliehr, In Search of an Audience: How an Audience Was Found for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, New York, 1968.

## Chapter 3

### Procedures

The procedures for completing this thesis began with a library search at the Rowan University library. The library search encompassed the Rowan University Card Catalog. The key phrases were the following terms: “theater,” “theatre,” “audiences,” “theater audiences,” “theater history,” and “audience response.” From that search the author found several books that were useful in writing this thesis. The books Theatre Audiences by Susan Bennett and Distance in the Theatre, The Aesthetics of Audience Response by Daphne Ben Chaim provided insight to the history of theater audiences. The book, The History of World Theater, From the English Restoration to the Present by Felicia Hardison Londre, gave an overall history of theater and integrated the importance of the audience to a production.

Creative Arts Marketing by Elizabeth Hill, Catherine O’Sullivan and Terry O’Sullivan and In Search of an Audience by Bradley G. Morison and Kay Fleihr were helpful in getting background material. Creative Arts Marketing included many inside tips of the art industry. In Search of an Audience provided insight on how the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota raised their attendance records by 30,241 people in three years.

To prepare for the survey, the author assessed internal publications of Rutgers Camden campus and internal publications that the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts produced. The website [www.rutgers.edu](http://www.rutgers.edu) holds information about the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts and was studied. The author sought input from the Director of the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts, Virginia Oberlin Steel, and the Director of Marketing, Renee Jacobs Post. The books How To Conduct Your Own Survey by Priscilla Salant and Don A. Dillman and Creative Arts Marketing by Elizabeth Hill, Catherine O'Sullivan and Terry O'Sullivan gave sample questions for audience surveys as well as tips on response rates and feedback.

Selecting a sample size for a survey such as the one being conducted by the author is often a difficult task for a number of reasons. Principal among them is the difficulty one faces when trying to estimate the probable rate of survey return.

For the purposes of this thesis, the author wishes to make inferences about the likes and dislikes of audiences of the theatre. Specifically, it would prove interesting to delve into the reasons behind the disparity in size between audiences for certain events when compared with the average audience size. As such, the author determined that she wished to have the number of returned surveys *at least* equal to 1% of the entire audience database for the Gordon Theatre.

The first task undertaken was the calculation of the probable rate of survey return. Since a survey of this type has not been conducted in recent history at the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts, any observation will contain some degree of conjecture. To minimize this uncertainty, the author notes the following: although there are 6000 names in the theater's database, only an average of 100 people attended one of the five major

performances in the previous year. Thus an average of 1.67% of the database attended any given show and approximately 8.33% attended at least one show. If one guesses that roughly the same percentage of people who are interested attending a show during the course of a year will be interested in returning a survey, one can expect that about 8.33% of the randomly selected patrons will return a survey.

The first mathematical step in calculating the number of surveys to be mailed is determining how many surveys need to be returned to achieve a 1% sample of the audience database:

$$(\text{Size of Database}) \times (1\%) = (6000) \times (0.01) = 60$$

Achieving this number of surveys with the rate of return projected above, however, requires a large number of surveys to be mailed. To reduce this number, the author chose to include incentives with each survey. First, a bookmark with a listing of upcoming programs was included to pique the interest of the patron. Second, it was stated that all returned surveys would be entered in a drawing for free tickets to a show at the Gordon Theatre. The author then speculated that these incentives could increase the return rate by 50% to yield an approximate return rate of 12%.

With the number of surveys required, and the probable rate of return, the author calculated the number of surveys to be mailed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} (\text{Number of Surveys Mailed}) \times (\text{Return Rate}) &= (\text{Size of Database}) \times (1\%) \\ \Rightarrow (X) \times (0.12) &= (6000) \times (0.01) \\ \Rightarrow X &= \frac{60}{0.12} = 500 \\ \Rightarrow X &= 500 \text{ Surveys} \end{aligned}$$

As is suggested by the above calculations, the author selected to send 500 surveys.

A survey was developed and then mailed out to a sample of 500. The 500 names were randomly chosen from the six thousand-name mailing list of Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts. The author prepared the survey based on information that Virginia Oberlin Steel and Renee Jacobs Post wish to obtain and her own suggestions on pertinent questions. A first mailing was sent out to 500 people. Three weeks later, the people from whom the author had not yet received replies received a second survey by mail, asking them to return it within a two-week period. In the second mailing, 100 of the return envelopes were stamped to see if the return rate would be greater.

As it turns out, the return rate of the given population proved to be much higher than expected. Since 81 out of the 500 surveys were returned, the actual ratio was 16.2 percent—a full four percent greater than speculated. Future surveys and data collection attempts at the theatre would do well to use this as an estimate for similar survey return rates. These things notwithstanding, 81 surveys is a sufficient number given the original requirements, and as such, the author can proceed with the data analysis.<sup>1</sup>

By surveying the members of the mailing list, the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts will assess what type of programming the members are most interested in and what they would like to see in the future.

Recommendations will be developed on the basis of the research and information that is gathered from the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander McFarlane Mood, Introduction to the Theory of Statistics, McGraw Hill, NY, 1950 p. 126.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The results in this chapter are based on two identical surveys, that were distributed through the mail by the author. The author worked in conjunction with the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts on the survey. The printing and postage for the survey were paid for by the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts.

The first mailing of the survey went out to 500 audience members on February 22, 2001. The 500 audience members addresses were randomly selected from a database of 6,000 people. From the first mailing the author received 60 “return to sender” envelopes. The author noted the incorrect addresses so the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts could take those people off their database. The author obtained 60 more names from the database so the numbers were not skewed. From the survey that went out on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2001, 45 surveys were returned. Two envelopes were sent back that informed the author that the recipient had recently deceased.

The second mailing of the survey was mailed to those who did not return the first survey. The author kept track of those people who returned the first survey so they would not overlap. On March 21<sup>st</sup> 2001, 453 surveys were mailed out. One hundred of the envelopes had return postage included to see if that would help get a higher response



rate. 36 surveys were returned from the second mailing. Eleven of those were those that had the return postage.

Eighty one surveys of the 500 distributed were returned, yielding a return rate of 16.2 percent. The survey was one sheet of 8.5-inch-wide by 11-inch-long paper (see appendix A). The first mailing had yellow paper with black writing. The second mailing had blue paper with black writing. Bookmarks with the schedule of events for this season were included in all of the mailings. To increase the response rate, an incentive of a drawing for free Gordon Theater tickets was offered.

Although 81 surveys were returned, some of the questions have more than 81 responses. Some respondents filled in information for their significant other; thus, some questions have more than 81 answers. Likewise, some respondents left questions unanswered. This explains why in the data presented some questions have fewer than 81 answers.

### **Demographic Information**

The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts was interested in finding the demographic information of their audience members. Most audience members fall into the 46 to 59 age bracket. A majority of the people that answered the survey were female, which follows the thought process and information in Creative Arts Marketing. The highest percentages of audience members live in Camden City, while many are from Camden County as well. The author noted that some audience members had traveled distances of over 100 miles to attend shows at the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts.

Creative Arts Marketing stated that many people do not feel comfortable attending theater because they do not think that they are educated enough or they think it is for the “upper

class.”<sup>1</sup> The author did not find this to be the case when looking at the answers to the questions about education and income. Forty two percent of the audience members are college graduates and 32 percent make between \$21,000 and \$40,000.

How old are you? (n = 82)

18-25	4 percent
26-30	9 percent
31-45	34 percent
46-59	37 percent
60-74	11 percent
75 & over	5 percent

Are you male or female? (n = 72)

male	32 percent
female	68 percent

Where do you live? (n = 85)

Camden City	35 percent
Camden County	31 percent
Burlington County	12 percent
OTHER	11 percent
Gloucester County	8 percent
Cumberland County	2 percent
Salem County	1 percent
Philadelphia suburbs	0 percent
Philadelphia	0 percent
Delaware	0 percent

What is your highest level of education? (n = 85)

college graduate	42 percent
master's degree	29 percent
doctorate	7 percent
high school graduate	13 percent
college student	8 percent
high school student	0 percent

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Hill, Catherine O’Sullivan, Terry O’Sullivan, Creative Arts Marketing, Great Britain, 1998.

What is your total household income? (n = 69)

under \$20,000	1 percent
\$21,000 - \$40,000	32 percent
\$41,000 - \$60,000	28 percent
\$61,000 - \$80,000	10 percent
\$81,000 - \$100,000	14 percent
over \$100,000	14 percent

### **Ticket Information**

For the question of how audience members prefer to buy tickets, those surveyed were asked to circle all that apply. Buying at the box office and by telephone had the highest response rates while the internet was ranked fairly low. There are other theaters that do almost all of their ticket sales over the internet. However, from the answers on the survey, it is clear that for now the audience members at the Gordon Theater prefer a more traditional route.

How do you prefer to buy tickets? (circle all that apply)

box office	44 percent
telephone	40 percent
internet	16 percent

### **Programming Information**

Of the 81 people who were surveyed, 56 percent of them had not attended a program at the Gordon Theater in the past year. The program that received the greatest attendance was Gato Babieri, a jazz performer, with 11 percent attendance rate.

When asked what type of programming the respondents would be interested in attending at the Gordon Theater, 63 percent said that they would prefer to see guest artists and speakers. Fifty nine percent said that they were interested in attending jazz programs.

What programs did you attend last year at the Gordon Theater?

None	56 percent
OTHER	14 percent
Gato Babieri	11 percent
Eddie Palmieri	8 percent
The Ahn Trio : Ahn-plugged	4 percent
Music Fit For a Queen	4 percent
Luma: Theatre of Light	2 percent

What types of programs would you be interested in attending? (**circle all that apply**)(n = 82)

guest artists/speakers	63 percent
jazz	59 percent
musical theater	52 percent
drama	51 percent
films	39 percent
classical music	39 percent
performances for children	35 percent
ballet	32 percent
contemporary dance	30 percent
opera	24 percent
visual arts	21 percent
new work	15 percent
OTHER	11 percent

**Are there any particular artists you would like to see at the Gordon Theater?**

The audience members had a wide range of artist that they would like to see

perform at the Gordon Theater. The list is as follows:

- Dianne Reeves
- Joshua Redman - 2
- Yoyo Ma
- Spanish/Latin classical/jazz guitar
- Ray Hargrove
- James Moody
- Nancy Wilson - 2
- New York City Ballet Members
- ABT members
- Whispers
- Tina Marie
- Bobbie Humphrey
- Latin/Jazz - 2
- Prairie Home Companion

- The Roots
- Rochell Farrell
- Joe Sample
- Dave Mason
- Little Feat
- Pat Martino
- Luna Negra
- Ottmar Liebert
- Dream Girls
- New York Play
- Jill Scott
- Marsalis brothers
- Regina Carter
- Terrance Blanchard
- Nikki Giovanni
- Art Ensemble of Chicago and World Saxophone Quartet
- Pharaoh Sanders Quartet
- Hugh Maskela Ensemble
- Gil Scott Heron
- Eddie Griffin
- Andrew Dice Clay
- Peter Nero
- Maya Angelo
- Ahmed Jamal

### **Attendance Information**

The questions in this section focused on what motivates or hinders people attending programs at the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts and other performing arts events. When audience members were asked why they attend the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts, 49 percent said it was because of location while 48 percent said it was the programming that is available.

Audience members are hindered from attending performances mainly because they do not know about the performances (57 percent). The audience members surveyed had 21 percent of “other” reasons for not attending performances. Some of those reasons included: scheduling conflicts, no way of getting to and from the theater, and parking availability.

Specific interest in a performance is one of the main motivators for audience members to attend a performing arts show in general. Another key factor is affordable ticket prices, with 39 percent of those surveyed.

Why do you come to the Gordon Theater? (n = 81)

location	49 percent
programming	48 percent
cost	33 percent
OTHER	16 percent

What may hinder you from attending performances? (n = 81)

don't know about performances	57 percent
OTHER	21 percent
cost	13 percent
travel time	10 percent
location	9 percent

What motivates you to attend performing arts events in general? (n = 81)

specific interest in the performance	88 percent
affordable ticket prices	39 percent
location	20 percent
discounts	12 percent
OTHER	4 percent

### **Comments box**

The audience members who filled out the survey also had the opportunity to write any comments that they had in a specific area at the end of the survey. Those comments were helpful to the staff of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts. Some audience members put requests in the box and the staff members contacted those people.

## Chapter 5

### Recommendations and Conclusions

“Effective development of the arts... becomes, in our time and country, a matter of developing an audience as much as it does of training the artist.” – The Rockefeller Panel Report<sup>1</sup>

A summary of the results of the survey was created immediately after the survey was completed. Renee Post then presented the summary to the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts staff. The author suggests that the theater look at what the audience likes and dislikes about their programming and make an effort to work with these ideas.

#### **Survey Conclusions - Demographics**

Creative Arts Marketing suggested ways that the audience would answer the demographic questions. Many of these proved to be correct when studying the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts Audience base.

Question 1 - Thirty-seven percent of the audience members surveyed were between forty-six to fifty-nine years in age. This was closely followed by thirty-four percent being thirty-one to

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<sup>1</sup> The Rockefeller Panel Report, *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects. In Search of an Audience: How an Audience Was Found for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre*, New York, 1968.

forty-five. In general, Creative Arts Marketing cites these ages as being the ones who are most likely to attend theater events.<sup>2</sup>

Question 2 - The majority of the people who answered the survey were women (sixty-eight percent). This coincides with the people who call the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts box office, the majority being women callers. As such, the theatre should concentrate a greater effort on scheduling programming specifically geared toward a female audience.

Question 3 - Thirty-five percent of those surveyed live in Camden City. Thirty-one percent live in Camden County. These areas are the closest to the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts and it is convenient for audience members to visit the center.

Questions 4 - Forty-two percent of those surveyed are college graduates. Creative Arts Marketing states the fact that many people who do not attend the theater feel that they would not understand the material.<sup>2</sup> The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts may consider targeting people who did not attend college with a comprehensive guide to the theater.

Question 5 - Thirty-two percent of those surveyed make anywhere from \$21,000 to \$40,000 annually. This income level was lower than the anticipated level, and as such, the theatre may wish to gear its ticket pricing and incentive scheme to cater to this income bracket.

### **Survey Conclusions – Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts**

The next set of questions dealt with the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts specifically. The author wanted to see which shows audiences had attended, how they bought their tickets for the shows, and what types of programming they wanted to see in the future. Asking these questions will assist the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts with future programming ideas.

Question 6 - The audience members prefer to buy tickets either at the box office (forty-four

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Hill, Catherine O'Sullivan, Terry O'Sullivan, Creative Arts Marketing, Great Britain, 1998.



percent) or over the telephone (forty percent). Renee Post and the author thought that the internet would have ranked high. However, only sixteen percent of the people surveyed said that they would prefer buying tickets on the internet. Since patrons express a preference for telephone transactions, it is advisable that the theatre focus on installing an automated telephone ticket purchase system. This would allow patrons to use their preferred ordering means, but extend the hours and efficiency with which they may do so.

Questions 7 –9 – When asked what types of programming the audiences members were interested in seeing at the center, the top three answers were:

1. Guest artists/speakers.
2. Jazz.
3. Musical theater.

This is reflected in the answers for the programs that the audience attended at the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts last year. It also concurs with the answers people listed for the particular artists they would like to see in the future. While (in the 2000 season) the theatre billed a sufficient number of jazz acts, there were few to no guest speakers or musical theatre performances. Thus, the management of the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts should supplement their schedule accordingly.

Question 10 – 11 – The two main reasons people attend performances at the Gordon Theater are the programming and location. However, the one thing that hinders people from attending performances is that they are unaware of the performances. The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts sends out a mailing about each season. They may want to consider sending out individual mailings about each show rather than one mailing for the season as a reminder of scheduled events.

Question 12 – According to the audience members surveyed, the reason that people attend performing arts events is because they have a specific interest in the performance (eighty-eight percent). Therefore, if the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts looks to the audience to see what type of programming is wanted (Questions 7-9), they can program towards those desires.

### **Conclusions**

There are areas for further study within the topic of establishing audiences, not only by the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts but for theaters as well.

- The survey can be applied to other theaters, not only on college campuses but also community theaters.
- From many of the comments that were made in the comment box on the survey, it appears that children are a huge factor in arts attendance. Theaters can consider conducting a focus group or survey with them to get their ideas and see what they are interested in.
- The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts has a plan established for the next five years. For further study, the author suggests contacting the people to whom all surveys were sent. Focus panels can be conducted with both groups: those who answered the survey and those who did not. By contacting the people who did not answer the survey, it would show that the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts is still interested in what they have to say and may draw them to performances.
- The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts may consider tracking the audience members who answered the survey and what performances they attend after there are programming changes. For example, if a person had a specific performer that they wanted to see, did

they attend the performance? It is clear from the survey results that the main reason people attend performances is because they have a specific interest in the artist.

- The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts has a few promotional contests for free tickets. To expand their audience base, they could try host more contests, such as a word-of-mouth contest. If an audience member refers people to go to the center, that person could win tickets for an upcoming show. With a tactic such as this, the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts would not only be satisfying current audience members, they would also be gaining new ones.
- The author determined that sending out the stamped envelopes did not help with the return rate on the surveys. Out of the hundred stamped envelopes, only 11 percent were returned. However, 17.5 percent of the people who received only unstamped surveys returned them. Therefore, the stamps were not a determining factor in people returning the surveys. The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts may want to consider different incentives to entice audiences to participate in mail surveys.
- The public relations practitioners of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre came up with a three-point strategy to attract people who did not attend programming. This three-point strategy may be utilized by the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts in conjunction with the plan that they already have in effect. Other theaters may consider it to entice people to attend programming.
  1. Communicate an image of the Guthrie Theatre as one which puts entertainment and excitement into great drama.
  2. The satisfied audiences and admirers of this theatre constitute our best advertising. Use personal recommendation as a primary selling tool.

3. This theatre is not so important to our customers that we can spare any effort to make buying tickets and attending the theater as easy and pleasant as humanly possible. (p. 54)<sup>3</sup>

The Tyrone Guthrie Theatre survey was conducted in the early 1960s. However, much of what they learned through their experience can be applied to the theaters of today.

The arts must adapt modern methods to make purchasing tickets and attending performances as easy and convenient as other aspects of modern life are becoming. The arts must spend the money and effort and apply good manners to make the public feel welcome and comfortable as an individual would make a respected friend feel in his come. (p. 213)<sup>3</sup>

The Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts excels at reaching out to its audience members and making them feel comfortable. The comments on the survey are indicative of this statement. A positive image must be maintained in the eyes of the public so the center may continue to draw an audience and steadily increase the number of people who attend each show. Morison and Fliehr make the statement in their book: "... we cannot expect to have attention paid to us by every part of the community unless we first pay attention to every part of the community. The key is a desire to *serve* instead of a compulsion to be worshipped." By reaching out to the audience and looking to understand what audience members wants for a performance, the Rutgers Camden Center for the Arts looking to serve their community.

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<sup>3</sup> Bradley G Morison, Kay Fliehr, In Search of an Audience: How an Audience Was Found for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, New York, 1968.

## Appendix

## Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts

We are interested in hearing from YOU! Please take a moment to fill out this questionnaire. As a special thank you, names will be drawn at random for **FREE TICKETS** to an upcoming performance. Winners will be chosen from surveys with all of the questions answered, so make sure to fill out all of the information for your chance to win and return it by \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

**Please circle your response.**

1. How old are you?

- a. 18-25
- b. 26-30
- c. 31-45
- d. 46-59
- e. 60-74
- f. 75 & over

2. Are you

- a. male
- b. female

3. What is your highest level of education?

- a. college graduate
- b. master's degree
- c. doctorate
- d. high school graduate
- e. college student
- f. high school student

4. Where do you live?

- |                         |                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| a. Camden City          | b. Camden County     |
| c. Gloucester County    | d. Burlington County |
| e. Philadelphia suburbs | f. Philadelphia      |
| g. Delaware             | h. Salem County      |
| i. Cumberland County    | j. OTHER _____       |

5. What is your total household income?

- a. under \$20,000
- b. \$21,000 - \$40,000
- c. \$41,000 - \$60,000
- d. \$61,000 - \$80,000
- e. \$81,000 - \$100,000
- f. over \$100,000

6. How do you prefer to buy tickets? (**circle all that apply**)

- a. telephone
- b. internet
- c. box office

-over-

7. What programs did you attend last year at the Gordon Theater?

- a. Eddie Palmieri
- b. The Ahn Trio : Ahn-plugged
- c. Gato Babieri
- d. Music Fit For a Queen
- e. Luma: Theatre of Light
- f. OTHER \_\_\_\_\_
- g. none

8. What types of programs would you be interested in attending? (circle all that apply)

- a. musical theater
- b. opera
- c. films
- d. visual arts
- e. drama
- f. jazz
- g. guest artists/speakers
- h. contemporary dance
- i. classical music
- j. performances for children
- k. ballet
- l. new work
- m. OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

9. If you have a particular artist you would like to see at the Gordon Theater, please list below.

10. Why do you come to the Gordon Theater?

- a. Stedman Gallery exhibits
- b. location
- c. cost
- d. OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

11. What may hinder you from attending performances?

- a. cost
- b. travel time
- c. location
- d. don't know about performances
- e. OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

12. What motivates you to attend performing arts events in general?

- a. discounts
- b. affordable ticket prices
- c. location
- d. specific interest in the performance
- e. OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

13. Any additional comments would be appreciated.

**Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your input is appreciated. To be eligible for the chance to win the tickets, please return by \_\_\_\_\_ in the envelope provided. Thank you!**