



What's in a NAME scholarship?

by Yoko Renee' Mensing-Solick

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NAME implemented a new scholarship program this past fall to support a graduate student interested in attending the AAM Annual Meeting. As this year's scholarship recipient, I wanted to describe my experience at AAM and explain why students should take advantage of this incredible opportunity.

In addition to waiving my conference application fees, the scholarship provided admission to the NAME evening reception, the NAME Issues Luncheon, and the NAME Business Breakfast, plus a \$100 travel stipend. While the financial (and nutritional!) assistance was certainly generous, the most rewarding aspect of the scholarship for me was interacting with mentors during the conference.

My mentors were museum professionals, associated with NAME, from various institutions (e.g. art, history, and science museums) across the country. Kristine Hastreiter, president of NAME, greeted me at the conference and encouraged me to discuss my background and professional goals. At each NAME function, Kristine introduced me to a number of members who shared my professional interests. These mentors happily shared their museum backgrounds, discussed issues raised at the conference, answered any questions I had (which were many), and advised me on job-seeking and thesis development. For example, my mentors emphasized the importance of networking during my thesis research to add new dimensions to my exhibit content and save much-needed time and energy. However, they also cautioned that networking cannot substitute for good research, just as good research cannot substitute for networking.

From these conversations, I greatly expanded my understanding of the museum industry, the problems affecting museums today (such as dwindling funding opportunities and an aging visitor population), and the latest trends, methods, and technologies (e.g., kinesthetic learning and handheld visitor devices). The mentors, in turn, introduced me to other key professionals (including several industry leaders), and the effect snowballed from there. In just days, I built a web of professional relationships, potential contacts, and friendships.

The NAME scholarship therefore acted as the ultimate icebreaker, and allowed me to connect with an astounding array of talented individuals from all walks of museum life in a short time. As I am relatively new to the museum field, this approach to networking was especially helpful for me. Without it I would not have been as successful with the social aspect of attending such a large conference.

I will be a second-year student when I attend the next AAM conference. It will no longer be an intimidating and overwhelming space in which I feel like an outsider. I now have a strong foundation to make the conference a personally and professionally enriching experience. I cannot wait to build new relationships and reinforce old ones by sharing experiences and ideas.

This early exposure to the museum world has been enormously valuable to me. I have already looked to my mentors and other AAM acquaintances for advice, resources, feedback, and prospective job opportunities when I graduate. I've learned through accumulated advice that in planning my career I need to know what it is I care about before I can build a community of people who share my interests. By tapping into this support system that the NAME mentors helped me create, I can grow into the professional that I aspire to be. This scholarship really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and students and entry-level professionals would be shortchanging themselves if they didn't apply.

Scholarship applications are due February 15, 2005. The application form can be downloaded from the NAME website, <http://www.N-A-M-E.org>.