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OSU labs now at COSI

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By Kate Liebers

The observers have become the observed.

The students have become the studied.

The museum has become the laboratory.

The Ohio State University and the Center of Science and Industry have joined forces to create the Labs in Life project unveiled at COSI for the first time last weekend. The laboratory - a working research space amidst a museum's archived collections - is the nation's first of its kind. Enclosed by glass walls, the laboratory functions as a working research space for OSU faculty, graduate students and interns as well as an observable exhibit for COSI patrons.

"We are proud to be partnering with The Ohio State University," said COSI President and CEO David Chesebrough, who explained the project as "real-time research that takes place daily, in public view."

The project consists of three laboratories, each related to physical health. The Body Composition Lab features the BodPod - an egg-shaped capsule which utilizes air density displacement to measures a subject's body fat percentage and lean muscle mass. In the Bone Density lab, a subject's bone mass as well as calorie expenditure can be estimated. Finally, the Human Performance Lab presents the classic human physical fitness test as made popular in sport drink commercials; a subject runs on a treadmill with various attachments to his or her face to gauge physical fitness.

During the weekend's kick-off event, the OSU researchers associated with each lab project introduced the equipment and conducted brief demonstrations. However, for the weeks to come, the Labs in Life are to be primarily for research instead of demonstration.

"We're not just teaching what the BodPod does," said Dr. Carmen Swain of OSU's Health and Exercise Science Department. "We're actually in here performing these tests, collecting data, performing real research."

While Swain acknowledged the unique opportunity for researchers to conduct experiments at COSI, she also noted the importance from the public's perspective.

"A lot of times in the past research has been criticized because it's performed inside a laboratory and the results are never shared with the community," said Swain. "Here, we're in front of glass. The community is seeing our research, we're using them in the research, and then we're sharing the research back with them."

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"It helps really give the impact of how important research really is," she added.

One such research project Swain said she plans on pursuing involves the WiiFit. Measuring metabolic heart rate and oxygen consumption using the state-of-the art equipment, Swain said she wants "to find out if the WiiFit really makes you fit."

OSU President E. Gordon Gee, who made an appearance at the lab's debut, referred to the endeavor as "true science," which aims to "ignite the sense of possibility."

Chesebrough said the main goal with the Labs in Life "is to tap into the research that's relevant, that's cutting-edge, that's going on at Ohio State and make it accessible to the community."

"The science that we worked on with Ohio State was the kind of science that could be easily translatable to the public," Chesebrough continued, noting that the research themes might evolve over time.

OSU and COSI jointly funded the \$750,000 laboratory project, according to the Vice President of Advancement of COSI Deb Hackathorn, but a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services is being pursued for ongoing expenses.

Meanwhile, COSI received a grant from IMLS to support the interactive experiences outside the laboratories - experiences related to the research being conducted by the focused OSU researchers behind the glass walls.

"We're hoping that this is a new model for how we bring research on a regular basis in areas of focus into COSI," said Chesebrough.

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Comments

1. I want to Body Exhibit to come back. Bring that to COSI!

Jenna | 2009-05-20 - 04:20:00 PM (CDT)

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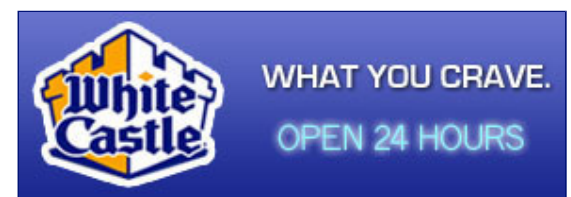
No, and this law is criminally under-reported.

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I will answer your question with another question: what is the legality of guerilla photography in regards to this matter?

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