



Evaluation Inception

An Evaluative Study of the UW Museology Evaluation Specialization

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Project Background: Host Site & Rationale

In 2014, the University of Washington's (UW) Master of Arts in Museology program introduced a Museum Evaluation Specialization to better prepare students for careers in this growing field. The specialization includes five courses (15 credits), beginning with an introductory class on evaluation principles and practices, and culminating in a yearlong, collaborative evaluation project conducted for a museum client. Since its launch, more than 70 students have completed the specialization, many of whom now work in evaluation roles within museums and other nonprofit organizations.

While the specialization has consistently had student interest, there is currently formal data to support that the specialization has been successful. The program director believes it is time to reassess the specialization to ensure it aligns with current field expectations and evolving professional standards. Because museum evaluation is still a young and dynamic discipline, it is essential to understand how professionals perceive this specialization and whether it equips students with transferable, real-world evaluation skills.

The findings from this study will help guide the future development of the specialization, providing insight for faculty, staff, and future cohorts across the UW Museology program.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this project was to conduct an evaluation study in support of the University of Washington (UW) Museology program's evaluation specialization.



Research:

This study is grounded in current best practices in both museum and evaluation fields. It draws on the professional competencies outlined by the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and the Visitor Studies Association (VSA), and is guided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's framework for qualitative methods.

Together, these tools provided a strong foundation for assessing the strengths, gaps, and future needs of the UW Museology Evaluation Specialization.



Evaluation Question One:

What do evaluation professionals think are the most important skills and competencies needed in new evaluators coming into the field; what would they expect of a graduate from a program with a specialization like UW Museology?



Sample:

Participants in this study included evaluation professionals from museums, nonprofits, and independent firms—ranging from private consultants to internal staff leading organizational research and evaluation.

Methods: Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data was collected through four one-hour focus groups with ten participants, along with eight individual 30-minute interviews and then transcribed and analyzed to find trends among responses.

These trends were then grouped into seven larger emergent themes, which were then cross-referenced with AEA and VSA evaluator competency standards.

Larger Emergent Theme	AEA Competency Domains	VSA Competency Areas
Curiosity and Comfort with Uncertainty	1.5, 1.6, 1.7 (Professional Practice); 3.4 (Context)	B (Informal Learning); E (Professional Commitment)
Soft Skills and Collaboration	5.1, 5.6 (Interpersonal)	C (Research Methods); D (Project Planning)
Dispositions and Reflective Practice	1.5, 1.7 (Professional Practice); 5.4 (Interpersonal)	E (Professional Commitment)
Facilitation and Relationship Building	5.2, 5.3, 5.7 (Interpersonal); 3.2, 3.6 (Context)	D (Project Management); B (Informal Learning)
Problem Solving and Critical Thinking	2.1, 2.14 (Methodology)	C (Research Methods & Analysis)
Professional Expectations and Project Realities	4.1, 4.10 (Planning & Management)	D (Project Planning & Resource Management)
Specialization vs. Generalization	1.3, 1.6 (Professional Practice); 3.1, 3.3 (Context)	A (Visitor Studies); C (Methods)

Findings:

Professionals value evaluators who communicate clearly, think adaptively, and collaborate well—combining technical expertise with a relationship-centered approach. These expectations align with AEA and VSA standards.

Graduates of the UW Museology Evaluation Specialization should be prepared to meet them, entering projects at any stage with strong methodological skills and the ability to convey findings effectively.

Evaluation Question Two:

What work did students who finished the program specialization go into; what did they feel most prepared for and how did they apply the skills and knowledge in their post graduate careers?



Sample:

A second set of participants included 56 University of Washington Museology Evaluation Specialization alumni representing graduating classes 2015-2024.

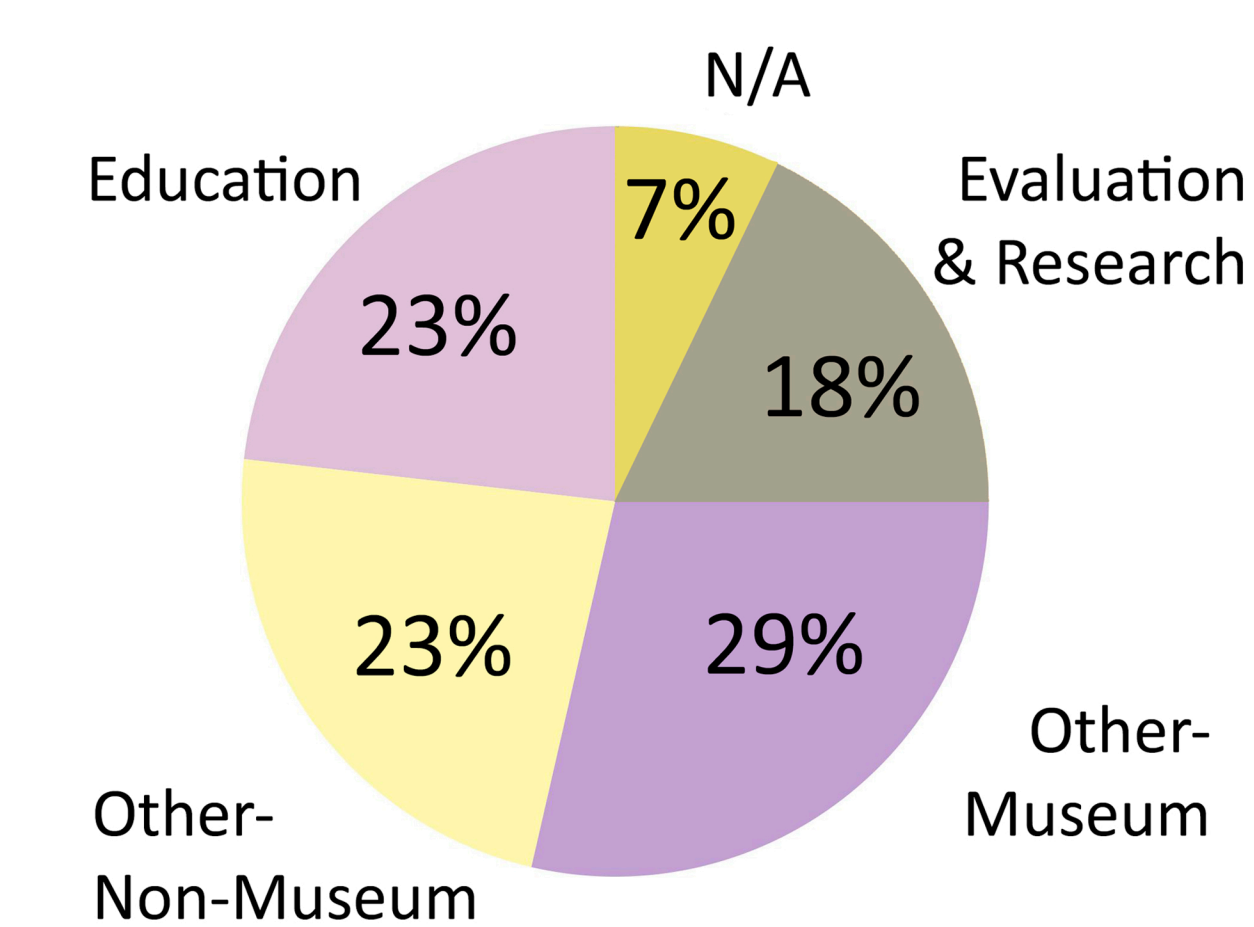
Methods: Data Collection and Analysis

Specialization alumni were sent a 15-minute incentivized online survey, that included both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Career Path

Alumni were asked about their career paths after graduation, including their current roles and the institutions where they work. The job distribution among alumni were then categorized into five job sectors:

Current (2025) Alumni Jobs



Evaluation/Research and Education roles include positions both within and outside of museums.

"Other – Museum" covers all other museum-related jobs, including work in historical societies, zoos, aquariums, and national parks.

"Other – Non-Museum" includes all other types of employment and "N/A" represents unemployed or did not respond.

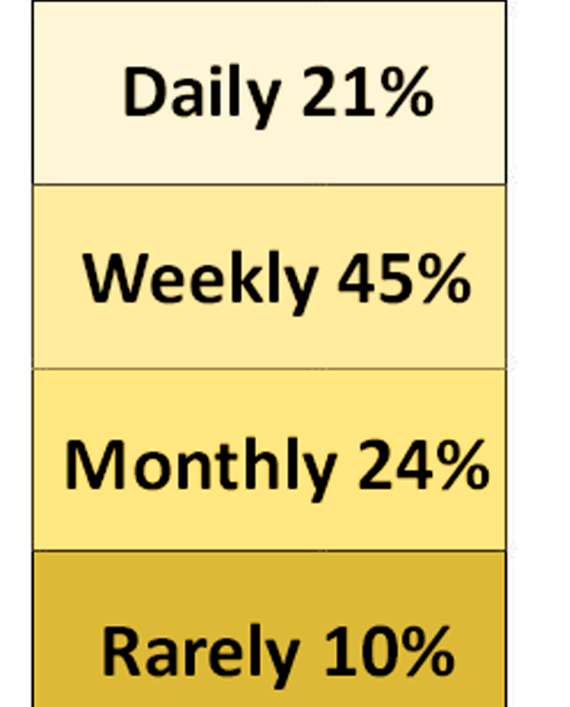
Only 15% of all alumni work directly in museum evaluation positions.

Transferable Skills & Professional Preparedness

Most alumni reported frequently using transferable skills from the Evaluation Specialization, such as project management (18%), collaboration (17%), and data analysis and interpretation (16%).

When asked to rate their feeling of professional preparedness upon graduation, 93% of alumni reported high levels of career preparedness.

Frequency of Use Transferable Skills



Findings:

The UW Museology Evaluation Specialization has successfully prepared graduates for a range of careers both within and beyond museums. However, despite its academic emphasis on museum evaluation, relatively few alumni have pursued careers as professional evaluators. This gap could be addressed through targeted workshops and expanded real-world opportunities, such as evaluation-focused internships and access to professional evaluator conferences.