Here's Your Sign
Behaviors driven by access to flight status boards at San Diego International Airport

Overview and Purpose
Airports are places filled with rules: park here, check in there, drop your bags, then go through security like this. Unfortunately, so many rules tend to cause confusion for the vast majority of travelers who use air travel infrequently. As a result, airports have information displays to support the performance of all travelers. A key performance support tool is the flight status board, which normally lists all arriving and departing flights and information about each.

AIRLINE / FLT. #		TO	GATE	SCHED	EST/ACT	STATUS
AirTran	439	Atlanta	A 15	1:17PM	--	On Time
Northwest	832	Detroit	C 63	1:22PM	1:22PM	On Time
Midwest	99	D.C. National	A 23	1:25PM	--	On Time
Continental	2173	Newark	C 68	1:45PM	--	On Time
Frontier	826	Denver	C 85	1:45PM	--	On Time

This study seeks to determine the effectiveness of flight status boards through behavioral observation. Do certain demographic groups spend more time deciphering the boards? Do other distractions prevent accurate cognitive processing of the information being displayed? Most importantly, can the data point to ways in which flight status boards may be improved, thereby helping our hapless infrequent travelers on their journey?

Methodology
Observations will be made at the San Diego International Airport at a centrally located flight status board in Terminal One.

In planning for this set of observations, six dimensions for fieldwork variations will be considered (Patton, Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods).

Fieldwork Dimension	Variation Notes
Role of the observer	Primarily *Observer*, though the nature of the setting requires some level of involvement as *Participant*.
Emic vs Etic perspective	As a fellow traveler, the observer will build upon known Insider (*emic*) patterns while looking peripherally for Outsider (*etic*) trends
Collaboration	There will be no collaboration with participants. This will be a solo collection effort.
Selective disclosure	This study will be completely covert. The observer will not interact with participants in any way. A possible exception would be if the observer was confronted by a participant.
Duration of observations	The observations will take place on two separate travel days, spanning no more than 8 hours each day.
Narrow vs Broad focus	The focus for observational dimensions will be relatively broad. The nature of the target population and environment dictate this. Without a specific hypothesis under investigation, multidimensional raw data is critical.

A sample collection form is included at the end of this treatment. Data collection will be via a database-equipped mobile device. In an airport setting, it is not uncommon to see people interacting with their mobile devices. This collection method will enable the observer to better blend with the participants.

Limitations
Airport security forces are constantly on the lookout for uncharacteristic behavior. The presence of an observer taking data may be misinterpreted as a terrorist "scoping out" an area for an attack. To address

this possibility, the observer will carry a copy of this initiating memo, proper forms of identification, and be instructed to maintain low visibility activities.

Some dimensions of the collection plan involve following participants after they view the flight status boards. It would be impossible determine what information a particular person gleaned from a board through observation alone. To gain as much information as possible, a representative sample of participants will be followed to one of several possible "next steps" in the travel experience, such as to the gate, a restaurant, or to the parking lot.

Some observation dimensions require a subjective judgment on the part of the researcher, such as age, sex, and demeanor of a participant. As much as feasible, such judgments will be accompanied by observable features and behavior to support the judgment.

Observation Instrument

This table represents the dimensions to be collected during observational events. Database information will be transcribed to a survey management tool for analysis.

Day of Week	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Time of day	Early AM	Late AM	Early PM	Late PM	Night		
Subject Sex	Male	Female					
Subject Age	0-20	20-40	40-60	60-80+			
Number in Party	1	2	3-5	6+			
Time viewing	0-5 sec	5-15 sec	15-30 sec	30+ sec			
Compared w/ ticket?	Yes	No					
Demeanor while viewing, with supporting behaviors	Annoyed	Bored	Confused	Despondent	Energized	Happy	Other
Next Action	Left Terminal	Went to gate	Went to check-in	Went to Restaurant	Went to Bathroom	Went to Baggage Claim	Other (explain)

Summary

This study will involve the observation of traveler interactions with information presented by San Diego International Airport flight status boards, and their actions subsequent to viewing the information. The observer will be non-collaborative, take observations over a short period of time, and observe a relatively broad array of dimensions.