Harvard Museums of Science & Culture Audience Research Project Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Harvard Museums of Science & Culture (HMSC) are comprised of the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments (CHSI), the Harvard Museum of Natural History (HMNH), the Harvard Semitic Museum (Semitic Museum or HSM), and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology (Peabody). In spring 2015, HMSC contracted with Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG) to conduct an audience research project to explore and evaluate the overall visitor experience.

GRG conducted an exit/intercept survey of 711 visitors across the four museums and a survey of attendees at eight spring 2015 HMSC public programs. A total of 758 attendees completed the public program survey, for an overall response rate of 60%.

KEY FINDINGS: MUSEUM VISITORS

- Museum visitors are representative of the area, under 40, slightly more female, and mostly White.

- Most museum visitors attend with others (relatives, friends, colleagues, etc.) and tend to spend more than an hour in an HMSC museum. Those who spend more time in the museum reflect more positively on their experience.

- Learning, both general and topical, is an important motivation for museum visitors, and tends to be of more concern than having a social interaction. Museum visitors distinguish between relaxation and social interaction, and place greater importance on relaxation. The strength of these motivations shapes the visitor experience.

- The visitor experience is enjoyable and satisfying. Visitors are engaged with the exhibits and leave the museums feeling informed and inspired.

KEY FINDINGS: PUBLIC PROGRAM ATTENDEES

- Public program attendees are older, more highly educated, and less racially diverse than the area population. They are comprised mostly of people who have visited an HMSC museum, primarily HMNH and the Peabody. They are also more likely than not to be repeat public program attendees.

- Public programs are differentially effective in broadening participation of potentially harder-to-reach groups (e.g., racially and geographically diverse groups, those without a Harvard affiliation). Programs that break the traditional lecture mold attract new audiences and are more successful in drawing women, younger attendees, and a more racially diverse audience.
While most public program attendees also participate with others, attending a program alone is more common than visiting a museum alone.

Learning motivations are also an important factor in driving the experiences of public program attendees.

Attendees have a satisfying and educational experience at HMSC public programs. Their expectations for learning about science and culture topics are met or exceeded, although the degree to which their expectations are exceeded varies quite a bit by HMSC public program. Attendees leave programs motivated to talk with others about the topics and enthusiastic about returning for a future program.