Hack the Museum  
Wintersession 2014  

**Project Brief**  

**The challenge**  
Natural history museums are perceived by the public to be one of the most static museum types in the country. Institutional inertia and professional mandates constrain the opportunities for the natural history museums to stretch and experiment with new ways to be relevant.

**Our approach**  
We want participants to go beyond their existing expertise and experience. By “hacking” the museum, we’ll play with what might happen if assumptions about the museum experience, objects, or environment no longer held true. Results of our experiments will be shared and tested with the Harvard community at a private event in the galleries on Friday, Jan 24, from 6:30-9pm.

Some questions to guide our experiments will be:  
. What is real?  
. How do you help visitors go beyond a sense of beauty, or “wow”?  
. How do you interpret the meta-museum, the humans in the story of an exhibit?  
. How can you encourage new ways of seeing the familiar?  
. How can we honor the past, without getting lost in it?  
. What is the best way to elicit the excitement of deep engagement?  
. What is the purpose of a collection, and who gets access to the objects in it?  
. Where does authority come from, and what stories/kinds of information matter?  
. What makes grown-ups playful and curious?

We’re also thinking about the fact that final projects produced in the workshop are meant to be experienced in a social setting, at a specific time, though they could come from or develop into thinking about other contexts.

So we want to know what makes a meaningful event experience:  
. How do you encourage people to interact in new ways, or with someone they don’t know?  
. What makes people feel as if they’re stepping into a unique environment or experience?  
. What kind of content is best delivered in this setting, and what are the best tools?

**Tools and Tactics**  
A lot of things can be done on a smartphone if you have one, and with free software on a laptop. We have a printer, and a supplies budget for more art supply type needs. There will be two pre-designed interactive curating platforms available too, courtesy of two of our visiting...
guests. Basically, we'll help you do a project that is feasible given your own skills and ability, and we hope that everyone will contribute their own expertise to support each other's projects.

Here’s how we’re thinking about the tools and tactics that might be put to use during the workshop:

**TACTICS**
- sensory manipulation/limitation
- visitor or intrepreter persona
- spatial/visitor movement intervention
- content manipulation or interpretation
- media layering
- storytelling and scenario building
- conversations

**TOOLS**
- games: digital, physical
  - available platform: Edventure Builder
- digital curation
  - available platform: metaLAB
- museum tour/live interpretation
- crowdsourced annotation (digital, physical)
- installation (object, environmental)
- wall text
- wayfinding
- maps and gallery guides (digital, physical)

**A note about museum names:**
**HMSC** is the Harvard Museums of Science and Culture, a recently created entity to bring together the public facing side of several museums.

**HMNH** is the Harvard Museum of Natural History. It is an HMSC museum and has been serving the public since approximately 1999. On display in the HMNH galleries are specimens in the collections of three research museums: the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ - all of the animals), the Harvard University Herbarium (HUH- owner of the glass flowers), and the Harvard Mineralogical and Geological Museum (HMGM).