Importance of Scientists Engaging Audiences

STEM literacy increases when scientists participate in educational activities, giving personal accounts of their own experiences in planetary science and exploration [1,2].

- Audience develops a personal connection to science and engineering, inspiring them to explore further [3,4]
- A planetarium is a science story telling tool
- Creates relaxed, informal setting
- Makes scientists and their research more approachable

The Portable Planetarium

The Lunar and Planetary Institute (LPI) offers a portable planetarium to institutions to borrow

- Learn about the night sky in a controlled environment
- The planetarium has been available for loan to educational institutions for over 10 years
- Use of the planetarium has increased over the past 2 years due to increased engagement of informal educational communities

Portable Planetarium Use by the Texas Community

Educators all over Texas (Fig. 2) have used the planetarium in various educational settings.

Figure 2: Where the planetarium has been used in the past year.

Planetarium User Feedback

“Seeing the planetarium ... gave us the idea for the Star Party. We had a great turnout, and people were lined up to see the shows. It was really wonderful to be able to provide such an incredible resource for our community.” – Angela B., Houston TX

“It was great! We loved it and would not have been able to have something like this without the help of [the] Lunar and Planetary Institute in Houston for loaning the Starlab. The kids and adults all loved it too!” – Paula W., Hutto Public Library, Hutto TX

“The Planetarium was a great opportunity to not only talk to elementary aged children about constellations but to show them. ... Without having the planetarium, we would not have been able to provide such a meaningful program.” – Caitlin F., Buda Public Library, Buda TX

“Everyone loved the planetarium. People from 50 miles away came just to attend. The planetarium presentation blended well with other night sky activities for the children as part of our summer reading program.” – Ann R., Llano Public Library, Llano TX

Details about LPI’s loaner program

- Institutions contact Christine Shupla, Education Lead at the LPI (shupla@lpi.usra.edu).
- LPI requires each borrower to be trained in the use of the planetarium. LPI also supplies suggestions and resources for planetarium shows, if ones are not already in place.
- Borrowers are required to personally pick up the planetarium and return it after use. Feedback is requested but not required.
- More information on LPI’s loaner program can be found by contacting Christine Shupla (shupla@lpi.usra.edu).

Figure 3: (top) Storage/transport of the planetarium. (bottom) Training on planetarium use.

References