

NOVEMBER 1-3 2015

DISTANCE LEARNING SUMMIT

ART MUSEUMS & EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION



CRYSTAL BRIDGES
MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



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BACKGROUND

In July 2013, Crystal Bridges hosted its first Distance-Learning Summit, which brought together more than 40 art museums and arts organizations to better understand the most common approaches to distance learning and to envision how art museums might further leverage this promising new educational method. The Summit served as a forum for Crystal Bridges to determine which approach or strategy to take as the Museum developed its own distance learning initiative.

For art museums, designing distance-learning opportunities involves more than simply making museum resources available online. Museums can leverage technology in a myriad of ways to dramatically expand their reach and impact, via new formats that provide choice and personalized learning experiences for learners. The Summit explored 10 different approaches to distance learning currently offered by art museums and arts organizations.

The model that seemed most applicable to Crystal Bridges was presented by Michelle Harrell and Emily Kotecki from the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA). In an effort to increase its reach to teens, NCMA had partnered with the North Carolina Virtual Public School to develop online courses in the visual arts for high school students throughout North Carolina. This model seemed a good fit for Crystal Bridges for two reasons: The state of Arkansas's 2013 Digital Learning Act requires all high school students to take an asynchronous online course for graduation¹, and the notion of having such a direct role in a student's school career was very appealing. The model also included a level of accountability not found in most art museum-school partnerships.

Following the 2013 Distance-Learning Summit, Crystal Bridges set out to study the current landscape of distance learning, with a focus on visual arts, and to develop a for-credit online course, with the aim of deeply connecting high school students to art history, American history, and museum studies. After a request-for-proposal process, Crystal Bridges selected Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), as its development partner. Over the course of a year, a cross-disciplinary team of museum educators, instructional designers, subject-matter experts, graphic designers, and programmers developed an online course titled *Art Appreciation: American Identity and the Art*.

Rather than progress through the artworks chronologically, the course begins with contemporary art. Two guiding questions are posed to students:

How did we get here?

How have artists shaped and reflected on American identity?

1. The Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing the Digital Learning Act of 2013 are available online (http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/rules/Current/Digital_Learning_Rules_-_FINAL.pdf).



Crystal Bridges partnered with Virtual Arkansas to offer and deliver a pilot of the course. Like North Carolina Virtual Public School, Virtual Arkansas is a supplementary provider of online courses, which are available to any public school student in the state. EDC and Crystal Bridges trained a few online arts instructors from Virtual Arkansas, tested the activities with volunteer students, and got formative feedback from both instructors and students.

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The Art Appreciation course launched through Virtual Arkansas with a pilot group of about 40 students from all over the state, including the communities of Deer (population 680), Hugh (population 1,441), and Star City (population 2,248). Students typically logged in to the course during one of their class periods at school. Though the course was asynchronous, students were paced in weekly units and used tools to engage in online discussions. Giving students opportunities to collaborate via discussion proved to be one of the most important elements of the course.

The assessments from the first course informed the development of a second course: *Art + Process: Creating a Body of Work*.

Crystal Bridges has an ambitious agenda as it continues to expand on its Distance-Learning Program. Its first task was to host a second, even larger Distance-Learning Summit. After soliciting applications from art museum educators to participate in the 2015 Summit, Crystal Bridges selected 45 participants from 37 organizations in the United States and Canada who demonstrated interest in expanding their organizations' distance-learning offerings.

While there are many valuable websites and other online resources to learn about the arts, we wanted to be sure that the act of collaborative meaning-making was not lost.



2015 DISTANCE-LEARNING SUMMIT

The second Distance-Learning Summit was held November 1–3, 2015, at the Crystal Bridges Museum of Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. The second Distance-Learning Summit was held November 1–3, 2015, at the Crystal Bridges Museum of Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. The focus was on approaching distance-learning initiatives with an entrepreneurial mindset, giving art museums a framework for creating online programs that are both sustainable and have a high impact. More than 60 professionals attended, bringing expertise from such disciplines as art museum education, instructional design, education policy, and entrepreneurship. Summit participants were passionate about K–12 education and were especially interested in building partnerships to help expand their organizations' reach.

Over the three-day summit, participants worked in cross-disciplinary teams to explore how art museums could strengthen K–12 education and to determine the role of online learning and technology in that process.

They considered three key questions:

How can art museums ensure that all students have access to high-quality, meaningful, and personalized arts education?

How can art museums have a more direct and central role in the education of the nation's students and beyond?

How can art museums partner with educational entrepreneurs to create models that are both sustainable and scalable?

The Summit was designed to promote innovative thinking, which was reflected in the agenda and Summit activities.

Highlights from each day of the Summit are shared on the following pages.

[Day 1 Presentation](#)



DAY ONE HIGHLIGHTS

In her opening remarks, [Anne Kraybill](#), Director of Education and Research for Crystal Bridges, presented the history of Crystal Bridges' relationship to distance learning and showcased the work of important partners, including EDC, Virtual Arkansas, and the Tesseract Center at the University of Arkansas, who embarked on this journey to help spread the museum's collections beyond Bentonville. Said Kraybill, "Finding the right partners can be everything."

[Students are now] connecting with Crystal Bridges and the collection in a way that a one-time field trip could never afford.

In addition, Crystal Bridges is providing a unique course offering to the state that expands access to quality arts education.

Kraybill outlined how Crystal Bridges strove to increase high school students' access to high-quality arts courses, taking participants from conception through development, implementation, and distribution.

The idea for a distance-learning initiative came shortly after publication of a study on school field trips conducted by Jay Greene, Brian Kisida, and Dan Bowen at the University of Arkansas ². The findings revealed that student gains from a one-time field trip were two to three times higher for students in rural locations. This was the spark that started Crystal Bridges' Education Program, which ultimately became the Distance-Learning Program.

While K-12 school groups already had access to the museum through field trips, thanks to the support of the Willard and Pat Walker Charitable Foundation, Kimberly-Clark, and Northern Trust, rural districts had less access to specialists and electives. With this in mind, Crystal Bridges decided to create an online program that would reach more students overall, but particularly students in these rural schools. Crystal Bridges determined that developing a for-credit online course could have substantial and meaningful impact on the careers of high school students across the region and the nation.

Kraybill concluded her remarks by emphasizing Crystal Bridges' philosophy: *"We believe that distance learning can transform K-12 education."*

2. J. P. Greene, B. Kisida, & D. H. Bowen (2014, Winter). The Educational Value of Field Trips. EducationNext. Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/the-educational-value-of-field-trips/>



Participants expressed their pleasure with the opening of the Summit:

“The flow of Sunday’s schedule was wonderful. The reception and dinner were great and opening presentations definitely framed the topic.”
Summit participant

“As a first time visitor, the walk to Crystal Bridges Museum left quite an impact. The idyllic trail to the museum, scenic natural landscape, its spatial proximity to downtown Bentonville, and even the way the building’s design opens before visitors with each step are all powerful introductions to an even more powerful collection.”
Summit participant

Students who visit a museum begin their learning by viewing a piece of art with a museum educator, who asks students to share what they notice about the piece. This is an artful thinking approach—one that is nonthreatening and does not expect students to know anything about the work of art. The things students notice are picked up on by other students as they listen to one another’s comments.

We tried to replicate this critical learning experience online. Using VoiceThread enabled us to provide students with an audio prompt and constant access to the artwork in the context of their comments on what they notice. The tool also allows students multiple ways to contribute—by voice, text, or video—and to point out, through marking, things they are discussing on the artwork.

[Kirsten Peterson](#), director of EdTech Leaders Online at EDC and the lead designer of the Crystal Bridges online courses for high school students and teachers, stressed the importance of design when building engaging online learning experiences. She shared the three instructional design tenets that her design team follows:

- 1.** Learning is a social endeavor. Quality relationships between the learner, facilitator, and participants strengthen understanding and create a sense of purpose and engagement for the learner. To ensure effective interactions among course participants, much depends on the design choices we make. For example, limiting the number of participants allows the facilitator to spend quality time with each one and to control for meaningful dialogue in threaded discussions.
- 2.** Using the right tool for the right purpose is crucial. Web-based tools offer an array of options for communicating, collaborating, gathering information—but there is no guarantee that any of them will be effective. What tool will be intuitive, long-lasting, work best for your audience, and provide the best “direct hit” to your learning objective? Start with your audience and your ultimate learning goal. Might your audience be familiar with the tool you are selecting, and will their school or organization support it? Can you name three or four ways that you could lead participants to meet your learning goal in the online environment?
- 3.** Focusing on human infrastructure is essential. The effective use of technology can greatly enhance and support capacity building. However, success depends on human, not just technical, infrastructure. It is important that the online environment have an intuitive and seamless user experience design and that the back end be functional. A smart technical design enables people to work effectively with the tools to scale communication, content delivery, and programmatic operations.³



Diana Garrison, an instructor with Virtual Arkansas, discussed her experience leading the Art Appreciation: American Identity and the Art online course. This is her second semester teaching the course, which is going smoothly—but the first semester had some bumps. There were some technological issues—broken links, tools that students had trouble accessing—which Anne and Kirsten responded very quickly to. The problem she didn't expect was that many students were enrolled by school administrators “who just needed to put butts in seats.” Many were graduating seniors who didn't care about the class and didn't need the credit, and many of them ultimately failed. However, several students surprised her.

Through several moving vignettes, Garrison described how distance learning is achieving the goal of bringing art to more students:

Logan, a senior, did not want to be there and saw no value to this course. He was a welder, already working in his trade and making money. When Session 5: Abstract Expressionism required an art project, Garrison said, “Don't go buy new art supplies! Use something you have available to you.” Logan said, “Well, there's this pile of scrap metal by the barn . . .” And then there was a glimmer in his eyes. He created a piece called Bumpy Ride, named for his “crazy life.” He described each piece of metal and why they were bolted where they were. He was clearly excited about what he had created and engaged by the project.

For the identity exhibit, students gather photos to represent their personalities, which they curate into an exhibit. Sarah, a beautiful 17-year-old girl, a dancer and a runner, opened her exhibit with a “traditional” ballerina photo: herself in a lovely pink tutu. But her final photo was a close-up of her blistered and calloused toes, a symbol of pride for this young athlete.

A rural high school student, Maddy W., summed up the feelings of many students in a blog post she wrote for Art Museum Teaching:

“It's thrilling to be able to look back and acknowledge, even early on, a conscious change in understanding from taking a course like this.” ⁴

3. Peterson further explores these thoughts in a blog post titled Designing Engaging Online Learning Experiences, available on EDC's website (http://ltd.edc.org/designing-engaging-online-learning-experiences?utm_source=edc&utm_medium=email&utm_content=20160225x&utm_campaign=newsletter).

4. You can read more about Maddy's experience as a learner on the Art Museum Teaching website (<https://artmuseumteaching.com/2015/02/12/museums-and-online-learning-a-students-perspective/>).



DAY TWO HIGHLIGHTS

Day 2 of the Summit kicked off with several compelling keynote presentations from innovators and leaders in arts education, technology, and policy.

[Nik Honeysett Presentation](#)

[Beth Harris & Steven Zucker Presentation](#)

Nik Honeysett, CEO of the Balboa Park Online Collaborative, addressed the question, “How can we enhance visitors’ angle of curiosity?” (i.e., getting visitors to literally lean in toward and engage with artworks). He shared examples of innovative projects, including Museum Hack in NYC (billed as “Museum Tours . . . for People Who Don’t Like Museums”) and Colonial Williamsburg’s RevQuest (a 21st century treasure hunt, where players are challenged to save the revolution by deciphering codes found throughout the Historic Area . . . via text message).

He noted several tech enhancements that museums can adapt for visitors, such as Coca-Cola personalization (leading consumers to eagerly search for their own names on a soda bottle), Amazon’s “one-click” (establishing a frictionless checkout process), and the Tinder model of App design (interacting with data one piece at a time, using only one hand).

Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, co-founders and executive editors of Smarthistory: Art History on Khan Academy, spoke on how institutions can ensure that their work will expand and continue to have use beyond their initial projects. Some key points:

Look at search results to understand what people see first when researching your area(s) of specialty—avoid the “Yellow Milkmaid Syndrome.”

Link with other institutions—literally! On your site, hyperlink to projects that have common interests.

Consider naming conventions—put critical information in your titles, and ensure that images that are similar to one another come up in a Web search.

Do not have your content live alone—make sure that visits are not one-offs. A good example is the Met’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, which pairs essays and works of art with chronologies, telling the story of art and global culture through the Museum’s collection.



[Richard Culatta](#), director, Office of Educational Technology, U.S. Department of Education, opened with a question (which he then answered!): “Why care about education policy? Because understanding education policy provides an incredible opportunity to engage with the 50 million students across the country who are not coming to your museum.” He noted that in two years, 70,000 schools will have access to Wi-Fi in their classrooms. For some, digitizing means replication of content, rather than transformation. How can we leverage technology to introduce new ways to engage with art? His suggestions:

Create creators. Example: Omeka, a free, flexible, and open source Web-publishing platform for the display of library, museum, archives, and scholarly collections and exhibitions.

Encourage students to curate their own projects. Example: Project NOAH, an app where people upload photos of plants and wildlife around them, creating a map of the natural world and contributing to scientific research in the process.

Consider how to augment reality. How can you layer on info that isn't possible to provide in the existing environment? Example: Kansas City's Union Station “Living History” app, which uses the architecture of the building to bring historic moments to life in the exact locations they took place. Users can take photos with historic figures or simply dive deeper into the background of each story.

Engage with experts. What has to happen onsite, and what can happen remotely? You wouldn't routinely send experts on a four-hour road trip—but could they give an hour a week to provide an engaging, interactive online learning experience?

“Museumify” the local schools. What can you bring to the school? Example: Pittsburgh Children's Museum Makerspaces Project—hands-on learning environments in schools, coordinated by museum staff.

[Richard Culatta Presentation](#)



Offer chances to “level up.” Museums make everything available when you walk in the door, which can be off-putting for students. Kids like leveled games, where you “earn” your way through. Have them earn digital badges for completing projects and demonstrating their ability to move up and through.

Consider many platforms and formats. Don’t lock yourself into one learning management system. Consider programs that work well with one another and enhance your projects.

[Christine Kuan](#), Chief Curator and Director of Strategic Partnerships at Artsy, described Artsy’s educational mission: to make all the world’s art accessible digitally. Artsy is an Art Genome Project that takes an “art without a search engine” approach, inspired by Pandora© (“If you like *this*, you might also like this”). The site now offers 45,000 freely downloadable images. Since its October 2012 launch, Artsy has had 10 million unique visitors from 190 countries.

Kuan walked participants through Artsy’s highly successful for-profit business model (i.e., “How are we doing all this for free?”):

Galleries pay a subscription fee to have their shows on the site. In return, galleries receive valuable monthly analytics, including numbers of and background info on visitors, the route by which they got there, and how many views an image has gotten.

Auctions and limited edition sales—Artsy takes a sales commission from works it sells.

Editorial programs—for example, producing City Guides of major museum collections and shows. Artsy now attracts media sponsors who want educational and editorial features on the site.

[Elizabeth Merritt](#), founding director and V.P. of Strategic Foresight at the Center for the Future of Museums, took us 25 years into future, asking, “What will learning look like in 2040?” She offered two examples of the “future of learning”:

The video game *Minecraft* lets kids have control; it empowers them by giving a whole world with rules and obtainable power, where they can unleash their imaginations.

[Christine Kuan Presentation](#)



CogniToy Dinosaurs is a smart toy powered by IBM Watson technology, designed to learn and grow with children, thus delivering a personalized play experience. Merritt pointed out that museums can be somewhat dysfunctional about capital:

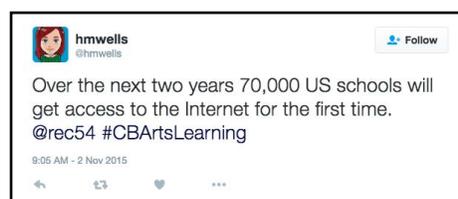
In a nonprofit economy, we provide things for our users, but a charitable foundation or government funder pays for it, which creates a disconnect. We can't count on these funders for the long run—this funding is not our operating budget.

To be financially self-sufficient, we need to calculate the consumer value of what we're creating—something so compelling or necessary that people would pay fair value for it, whether through fees, subscriptions, or paid advertising.

Something new to consider: social impact bonds, where cities enlist a private investor to provide start-up funds to a nonprofit to address a social problem, such as prison recidivism, illiteracy among children, and homelessness. If the nonprofit can demonstrate an improved social outcome, the city pays back the investor, and the nonprofit gets a contract to continue the work. Museums are uniquely situated to respond to social problems. Can your museum come up with a project to address a particular issue?

These talks inspired participants to think in new and more entrepreneurial ways and to expand their perspective of the art museum's role: *How can art museums use online learning and technology to create more meaningful and sustainable solutions in K-12 education?*

Using the hashtag **#CBArtsLearning**, participants shared key takeaways from the keynote presentations on Twitter. Here are some examples:



*Any plausible future
already exists a little bit today.*
Elizabeth Merritt

[Elizabeth Merritt Presentation](#)



In the afternoon, participants were divided into five teams and tasked with working together to develop an art museum-based solution—one that leveraged online learning and technology—to a problem in K–12 education. Each team used the fictional case study of **Museum X**, a museum from the American Alliance of Museums, which incorporated many of the common issues that participants faced in their own museums and organizations.

MUSEUM X SCENARIO

In the most recent round of strategic planning, the board assessed Museum X's performance against its mission, vision, and core values—and identified its educational efforts as falling short of its aspirations. The board challenged the staff to propose a new education initiative that meets the following criteria:

It is a significant learning resource for the community (mission)

It is a core educational resource for the community (vision)

It fosters life-long learning and provides educational experiences for intelligent beings of all ages (core values)

In addition, this proposed initiative needs to fulfill the terms of Museum X's agreement with the state to provide significant resources for art education in the public schools.

Finally, as neither the board nor the state legislature is able or willing to provide additional funding, the staff need to identify sources of startup funds and to create a sustainable business model for this initiative through existing or new revenue streams.

[Team 1 Presentation](#)

[Team 2 Presentation](#)





By the end of the day (or, for some teams, in the wee hours of the night), each team had formulated a plan to present to a panel of judges—the Distance-Learning Summit’s “Dolphin Tank.”

Your proposal must include the following:

A clear statement of the problem you hope to solve Analysis:

- Who are the learners, and what are their characteristics?
- What is the desired new behavior?
- What types of learning constraints exist?
- What are the delivery options?
- What are the pedagogical considerations?

A description of the intervention’s design:

- How can you enable the judges and audience to envision your solution?
- Can you create storyboards or other visual representations to illustrate your design?
- What will the interface be like?
- What will the user experience be like?

[Team 3 Presentation](#)

A funding mechanism:

- How will this program be funded initially?
- How will the fundiWng be sustained?

An evaluation plan:

- What does success look like?
- How will it be measured?

[Team 4 Presentation](#)

This scenario-based interactive activity brought together art museum educators, and entrepreneurs with experience in art- and education-related start-ups. Each team was also assigned an instructional designer from EDC and a team mentor who led the group through the process and kept them on track. These pairings proved to be very fruitful, as the entrepreneurs learned more about museums, their resources, and their work, and the museum staff gained both a framework for sustainable business planning and useful contacts and mentors.

[Team 5 Presentation](#)



DAY THREE HIGHLIGHTS

The Dolphin Tank judges panel comprised representatives from art museums and the fields of philanthropy, technology, and K–12 policy. Each team pitched its idea in a 10-minute presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions from the panel. This gave participants both feedback from multiple perspectives and real-world advice they could take back to their respective institutions.

The day culminated with the judges selecting the winning group.

*The National Gallery of Art would have to operate for 217 years to have a billion visitors, but is a TED talk as good as a museum visit? Is any online experience as good? There's a lot of doubt among museum leaders that online experiences can be as authentic, as impactful, as a visit to a museum. But try Googling "TED talk made me cry" and then read *Art Museums and the Public*, a 2001 report by the Smithsonian Institution Office of Policy and Analysis.*

Michael Edson, Smithsonian Institution, in *Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystem*, copyright 2014 American Alliance of Museums

Summit participants left the Distance-Learning Summit energized and eager to put their new learning into action at their museums or organizations.

The Distance-Learning Summit was a wonderful way to connect with other museum educators, as well as experts in other fields, and to pool our collective expertise to brainstorm new and creative ideas for using technology in museums and in schools. I came back from my three days at Crystal Bridges with many useful insights that will definitely help shape the future of our own online program at the MFA.

[Susan Fonda](#), Manager of Teacher Resources and School Partnerships, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

We are honored to collaborate with Crystal Bridges and so many other museum, business, and education leaders to strategize and build solutions for bringing museum resources and learning into formal education arenas. To me, the Distance-Learning Summit exemplifies the power of partnerships. Crystal Bridges is leading the charge to make museums part of innovating learning, and they are pouring resources, time, and passion into making this happen by galvanizing the energies of committed leaders from diverse fields.

[Kirsten Peterson](#), Director, EdTech Leaders Online at EDC





CONCLUSION

Don't just digitize a museum experience—transform it.
What can you do digitally that you cannot do in person?

*It [the Museum] is so gorgeous—
I think it's going to take days to recover
from being here.*

Richard Culatta, Director, Office of Educational
Technology, U.S. Department of Education

[Symposium Final Thoughts](#)

Online learning offers enormous potential for transforming K–12 education, and the Distance-Learning Summits touched on only a few ways that art museums can be integral to that transformation. Through digital courses and activities, museums have the opportunity to directly reach students and their teachers, especially those in rural and other schools with limited funds and/or no access to the buildings.

Schools throughout the country are experimenting with different ways to educate children using online and blended learning. Today's students have more access to different kinds of coursework from a wider variety of providers than ever before. Museums have a prime opportunity to move from the periphery, as a supplemental provider of arts education, to a more central role in the curriculum.

While some museums are poised to offer distance learning and are eager to reach more students and teachers, doing so means more than simply making collections available online to the masses. High-quality distance learning requires thoughtful planning, collaboration, and systematic instructional design that carefully considers the learners, the learning objectives, and the best tools to meet those objectives. Before implementing a distance-learning program, museums should work closely with K–12 schools to review online course content to ensure that it aligns with the schools' standards and goals.

A common theme that emerged from the Summit was that museums should seek to transform the museum experience for students. Instead of simply digitizing museum content, they should create activities that can only be done online and can't be done in person at the museum.

As schools increasingly embrace online and blended learning, museums must be proactive in following their lead.

As online learning becomes a standard part of the way K-12 students access coursework, museums have the opportunity to directly reach students and their teachers. It is up to museums to proactively be a part of that transformation.

Anne Kraybill, Director of Education and Research, Crystal Bridges





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