

THE VISION: BUILDING A GRASSROOTS CAMPUS ARTS COMMUNITY

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2019

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank the Academy for allowing me to put my life's passion to work. I'd like to thank my mother for providing me with guidance, perseverance, and inspiration to explore the wonders of life every step of the way. I'd like to thank my father for bringing the love for music into my life; for reminding me that perfectionism comes from loving your craft with an undying desire to provide the world with your best each time you create. To my future children, I can't wait to watch you grow up and embrace your passions and desires. I'd like to thank Ball State University and all those who have journeyed with me through these trying past two years. Finally, I'd like to thank every creative individual who chooses to pursue their passions, providing the world with artistic gems even when the world doesn't provide gratitude or recognition back. I believe that so long as we create for ourselves, we will find happiness in our life's work. Making art that is enticing to others is just the added bonus.

Abstract

CREATIVE PROJECT: The Vision: Building A Grassroots Campus Arts Community

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DEGREE: Master of Arts

COLLEGE: College of Communication, Information and Media

DATE: May 2019

PAGES: 33

Universities grant students access to state-of-the-art resources for educational purposes, however, these resources are often restricted to those in certain curriculums. The Vision was a project to build a grassroots, participant-designed community for students to explore their passions, share resources and knowledge, and to create, collaborate, and grow as artists outside of the classroom. The Vision functioned as a self-structuring community driven by student interests, and embraced student autonomy as the primary ingredient for community growth. Surveys conducted at the end of the study give insight to the successes and failures of the project. A website was created to showcase the participants and purpose of The Vision, while tracking analytics from website engagement and participants social media accounts.

Keywords: music, art, community, digital storytelling, design, production, creative space, collaboration

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Introduction

The world tells those with a soulful, creative mind to embrace their creativity, to shoot for the stars and to never let anyone get in the way of their aspirations. Art allows people to express themselves and connect with others. It provides many performers, artists and filmmakers with successful careers and financial stability. Student creatives around the world dream of their talents being discovered and to reap the benefits of their hard work.

The creative industries often constrain artistic expression. Though these industries may accelerate the career of one creative, they filter others. Major record labels, for example, have controlled the work of musicians for decades as artists signed one-sided deals, benefiting record labels more than artists during legal disputes (Okorochoa, 2011, p. 2). Though recent publishing contracts allow musicians to exchange earnings for cash advances and tour funding (p.1), the artist is still contractually bound to repay the advances. These deals are dangerous for artists when album and tour sales don't make up the amount lent by the label.

Artists have consistently been stripped of deserved earnings for their creations due to label greed. For example, when CDs and CD burners appeared the record labels complained about losing record sales. They managed, however, to implement a surcharge of \$2-\$12 on companies selling CD burners. In 1994, more than \$34 million in surcharges were collected, none of which was given back to the artists (Bishop, 2010, p. 102).

Streaming sites pay a fraction of a cent per stream. Digital age music enables consumer piracy and file sharing that reduces income for artists. College students are notorious music pirates, with more than 40 billion files downloaded in 2008 (IFPI, 2009, as cited in Jambon & Smetana, 2012), yet streaming sites such as Spotify looked to relieve the music industry of its lost sales due to piracy. Spotify founder Daniel Ek explained that music consumers would be willing to not pirate music only if something else came along that was just as rewarding as pirating (Lynskey, 2013).

However, in the wake of music streaming, piracy remains as an easy avenue for free access to almost any song. Sites like YouTube provide avenues for music piracy and illegal downloading. Third-party websites like *Youtube to MP3* give people free access to downloading unlimited amounts of music without paying. Like major music labels, YouTube is secretive about the allocation of payment for creative works. YouTube splits revenue with content creators, but the percentage is a mystery (Raine, 2017).

Universities are buzzing with creativity, from those who are studying the creative arts, to those who make their own art as a hobby. However, there are colleges and universities that don't provide students with the resources they need to create and promote their art. Groups of students often create their own artistic communities. For example, jazz students at Ball State University created a popular Thursday night jam session at a local café. These jazz nights allowed Ball State jazz students to improvise and perform, building a community of musicians that gathered weekly in front of a local audience.

A community in which a collective of students create, collaborate, share and promote their work together outside of institutional structures is hard to find. Students need a space to tell their stories and practice their skills, and learn from others. This project created a student-driven community for students to build relationships with their peers, grow as creatives, and to gain exposure for their work.

The Vision is a prototype community of six students with dreams of pursuing their creative passions professionally. The member-chosen name implies “the grind that happens before the payoff,” (The Vision Community, personal communication, 2018). The Vision meets weekly, allowing time for students to critique work, to collaborate on creative pieces, and to create content.

This project examined the development of The Vision community and its individual members over five months. Students held regularly scheduled meetings for creative work, and met

off-schedule as often as wished. Throughout the project, video blogs, interviews, and b-roll footage were gathered to showcase ongoing progress and engagement. This content is promoted on a custom-built digital platform that allows the surrounding community to follow the The Vision and its artists as they develop. This creative project will provide meaningful data showing the successes and failures of this type of approach to community building and digital storytelling. The students of The Vision are expected to leave with a better sense of their creative worth, taking with them tools for how to promote themselves without having to give away their artistic freedoms to music labels and other for-profit corporations. This project provides students with blueprints for building creative communities on their own campuses, and a roadmap for how to promote individuals to their wider communities. By providing a platform to tell their stories and to promote their art, participants might gain exposure, build a fanbase, expand their portfolios, and potentially profit from their work, with hopes of moving from starving artist to thriving artist.

Contexts

The Music Industry Transition Into The Digital Age

People view big-name artists as movers of culture, innovators of societal trends, and as spokespeople for new ways of living. Artists that “made it big” by signing record deals lay the beat for undiscovered artists to follow. These successful artists thrived before online distribution when record labels would promote artists’ music to mass audiences. When the popularity of MP3s led to the decline in CD sales, record labels searched for ways to gain back the profit that they had lost in retail. Brian Hrats (2012) explains how instead of investing in a multitude of artists and bands to gain a diverse talent pool, labels sought out “winners” or “hit-makers” that would bring guaranteed profit to the label. Less focus on talent development and more focus on label profitability arguably caused a negative impact on the quality and diversity of music being released to the public. Rather than highlighting the unique styles of various artists, labels became obsessed with the power of hit singles and valued the development of fabricated superstars; the poster children.

However, the digital age has allowed consumers and producers to engage directly without labels as the middleman. Rather than allowing major labels to distribute their music, independent artists are finding ways to build relationships and gauge fan interests through the internet (Choi & Burns, 2013, p. 44). Thus, co-creation of content is imminent as the producers of content look to the consumers for creative direction and direct feedback. The quality of music will always be based on personal opinion, but the digital age has made it easier for artists to tailor their music closer to the likings of their fans by opening up channels for co-creation, allowing consumers to be a part of the production process.

Social media has captivated the world, and exposure of both the mainstream and independent artist has increased through its use. Social media catapulted indie artists to the center of attention, allowing the undiscoverable to become discovered. Viral marketing, also considered

electronic word-of-mouth, allows companies, brands, and people to push marketing messages that reach a large audience (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011, p. 255). Along with online marketing came online platforms for artist-to-consumer distribution. Sites such as *Distrokid* allow anyone to upload their music for distribution to over 150 partners such as *Spotify*, *Apple Music*, and *Tidal*, while taking no commission cut from an artist's earnings (Martinez, 2017). This type of distribution also contributes to a crowded music market as artists can upload unlimited quantities of music to online distribution platforms. Unfortunately for independent artists with a small following, creating the contemporary equivalent of a "hit record" is tough. *Billboard* compares this to searching through a cluttered desk: New music is only found when someone actively looks for it. Even if a recording is recognized by a large group of people it may still disappear into the clutter of other releases from that same month (Beall, 2010, p. 68).

Music's transition into the digital age also influenced changes in music production and recording practices. Josh Tyrangiel (2009) explains the concept of Auto-Tune, a music production and recording tool that takes vocals that are out of pitch and forces them into the correct pitch. Tyrangiel explains it as the "Photoshop for the human voice." It is easy to use tools to correct an artist's voice for higher quality sounding music, but reaching for perfection in music doesn't mean that music with imperfections is also lesser quality. The new age of hip hop includes the birth of 'mumble rap', a term commonly used by consumers of rap music. Mumble rap can be defined as "the uttering in a low, confused, indistinct, or inarticulate manner," (Abraham, 2018, p. 9). Abraham mentions how mumble rap isn't necessarily the act of mumbling, but is phonetic analysis, or "the absence or alteration of certain syllables or sounds in the production of a word or phrase." The concept of mumble rap has split the hip hop community into those who believe it to be detrimental to the quality of hip hop, and those who view it as a unique form of rapping, believing the style of mumble rap has its own place in hip hop's evolution. Unlike previous eras of hip hop that were

centered primarily around themes of political awareness, today's hip hop has its own creative flare.

Tim Kinoti writes the following in his journal on the state of hip hop in today's society:

In addition, this creativity has increased the overall quality of the music being produced.

Hip-Hop has given artists such as Kanye West, Tyler The Creator, Travis Scott, XXXTentacion, and others to the room to reimagine the sound of the genre creating hard hitting rap while fusing together multiple genres, utilizing orchestras, sonic experimentation through technology, and branching outside of common themes usually found in rap (Kinoti, 2018, p. 9).

Each generation has different opinions on what they believe to be quality music, which makes the debate less of a factual one and more opinionated one.

The Effects of Building Community Around People With A Common Goal Or Interest

Over the past 20 years, technological innovation has aided humanity's intellectual and social growth. People worldwide spend hours every day surfing the web and communicating via social media, consuming and producing massive amounts of information. Does all this information help foster community building and development between those offering information to the rest of the world? Keith Sawyer (2017, p. 6) writes that not all collaboration leads to team building and flow. Flow, he notes, occurs when "we perform at our peak and lose track of time." Online tools such as *Slack, Google, Facebook, Instagram*, and others, have helped with group collaboration and community building. Sawyer adds that in order to harness the power of each of these platforms one must understand how to use them to promote creative collaboration.

Social media is allowing artists to promote themselves to major corporations without a middleman. For example, Carlota Zimmerman noted the process that a fellow actress used to promote herself on *Facebook* and *Twitter*:

By creating that page, she was announcing herself and her experience to the world; she was announcing herself as a professional actress engaged in developing her brand. She took herself and her ambition seriously enough to create a one-stop resource, where casting agents, directors, playwrights and her fellow actors can experience her personality and the depth of her abilities. She made it easy for others to help her get the roles and opportunities she wants (Zimmerman, 2014).

The more musicians use social media to project themselves to the world, the more chances they have to connect directly with and expand their audience. Boosting one's social media presence allows for development of one's fanbase and to build a community with their fans and collaborators.

Duncan Foster (2010, p. 273) produced an outline of what is necessary for successful music community development. This list includes items such as localized meeting spaces, local performance spaces and forums, rehearsal spaces, access to useful technology combined with well informed and relevant training opportunities, and a culture that encourages creative expression through music.

Digital Storytelling and Its Impact On Community Building

Freidus & Hlubinka (2002) mention how "digital stories begin with an assumption of communicating with an intended audience." They explain how when people are pushed to present their work to their peers, there is an element of pressure for producing original content that captures an audience. By experiencing the work of others in their group, oftentimes ideas build on top of each other through peer-to-peer inspiration. This builds bonds within the community and pushes each person's creativity further than one might individually.

Student and Community Access To University Spaces For Pursuing Passions

Universities provide buildings and resources for students to complete the work required in their major fields of study. However, not all universities allow the general student body and non-student community members access to these campus resources, buildings, and learning spaces. Phone interviews conducted during the Cornell Project (Cantor, 2005, p. 3) showed that few respondents mentioned there being funds or spaces for community and campus artistic collaboration. Some mentioned there being spaces for the performing arts to which only long-established partners had access with advance registration. These spaces are identified as performing arts centers or concert halls.

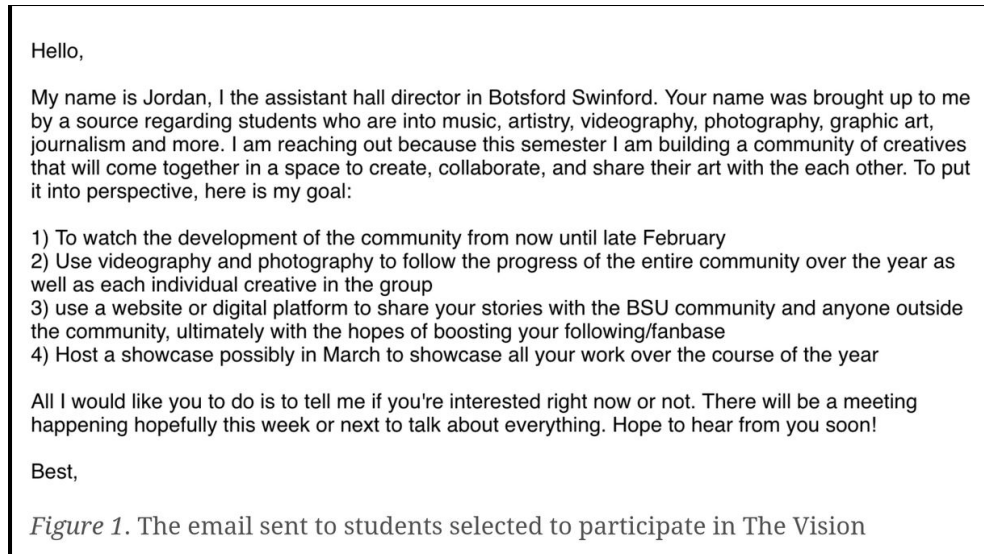
Many universities provide resources that expand and support their developing curriculums. Stephen Syverud built two electronic music studios, one at Jackson State College in 1968 and the other at Grinnell College in the 1970s. Cleve Scott also developed the Electronic Systems for Music Synthesis studios in the 1970s, and would go on to develop the music technology program at Ball State University (Wilson, 2017, p. 245). After his retirement, Ball State designed a music instruction building which opened in 2004, including a 600-seat performance hall, faculty studio offices, as well as “six recording spaces, two large recording control rooms, five digital audio workstation rooms, an SACD (Super Audio Compact Disc) mastering/post production studio, two multi-workstation computer labs, a room for critical listening of stereo or multi-channel audio, and an office/workshop for a systems engineer” (Kothman et al., n.d, p. 2). These resources require special card swipe access which are only given to select students. This deters students with external majors from using the spaces unless they are granted access or are with students who do have access.

This review of related literature demonstrates that the music industry has both benefited and complicated careers for artists. It is difficult for them to support themselves, and those without widespread recognition have a hard time contracting with labels, streaming companies, and others.

However, the direct public access of the internet age has provided paths for collaboration, experimentation and engagement. Some artists are comfortable as self-promoters. Others seek support through a broader community of independent artists as they look to become established names in a crowded industry. This research provides support for why communities on college campuses such as The Vision are important for the next wave of artists to develop their careers.

Project Design

This creative project provided a physical space where students used their skills to create, collaborate, and share their work as a community. This process started by bringing a group of seven students together in a shared workspace. To find these students, I spent time asking peers to identify anyone with a passion for pursuing their passions. I received names of seven Ball State students and reached out to them via email. Figure 1 shows the drafted email that consisted of an introduction, the outline of the project, and the desired outcomes for the community. Students were selected based on an informal list of predetermined criteria.



First, a minimum of four students and a maximum of eight students was set as the target size for The Vision. This ensured enough students to fuel collaborative possibilities, but not so many that the community became overcrowded and difficult to manage. Second, students had to be passionate about music in some way, otherwise their participation in the community would be insufficient. Third, students had to live at or in close proximity to Ball State University to allow for the best possible access during the study. Fourth, students were selected for a diversity of demographics, skill sets, and passions. Students were recruited while they used campus music rooms, common area pianos, and by speaking to students with whom I had existing relationships.

Last, students were selected based on their enthusiasm for joining the community. Any student with minimal interest was removed from the list of possible participants.

Once students confirmed their interest, meeting times were set for Sundays at 3:00 p.m. I also encouraged collaboration outside these regular meetings. Each meeting began with an update on the students' work. To establish a collaborative environment, a song was produced collectively by all participants during the second week of the study. Collaboration also stemmed from brainstorming periods where each student offered ideas for collaborative works, activities, or projects. Off-schedule collaboration allowed for students to explore new technologies, write songs and verses together, and storyboard music videos and campaigns.

Students were encouraged to come to each weekly meeting with a new work of art, ideas, technologies, or questions, all of which encourage creative production. To fuel interactive meeting periods, students would showcase their work or propose a question to the group. They presented new music, lyrics, videos, graphic designs, and more. Afterwards, students gave feedback to each other to influence collaborative discussion. Finally, students were allowed time to storyboard ideas for projects they wanted to complete, or to observe other students as they collaborated on ideas. Students stayed for a minimum of an hour each meeting with open collaboration time after.

The students created material that people inside and outside of the community could engage with. This included introductory video interviews of each student that explain how they developed their passions, and videos that showed collaboration between the students. The students had the idea of shooting mini video episodes each week that would be posted on the website for people to follow the community's development. The students also wanted to create a short film as the year-ending piece for The Vision which would be released on the website in the spring.

Due to limited funds and available space, meetings were held in my apartment on campus. Equipment included two studio speaker monitors, an interface for adjusting volume and using

microphones, a midi keyboard and a drum machine. Students brought their personal tools to the space when needed. Cameras and lights owned by Ball State's Digital Corps were also available for use. These cameras, as well as cell phone cameras, were used to capture moments that occurred in The Vision. Those creating content would sit around the kitchen table and those observing would listen from the living room.

A website was designed using a template from Wix that hosted video content from meetings with The Vision, brief biographies of each student, testimonial blogs with quotes from each student. The website included links to music by students from The Vision and their social media and described the community's purpose and philosophy.

The Vision Website: Design Thinking Activities

Design thinking activities were conducted to ideate ways to design the website for The Vision. There are many definitions for design thinking, but as written in Plattner, Meinel, and Weinberg's (2009) book on design thinking, it is a method that "melds an end-user focus with multidisciplinary collaboration and iterative improvement and is a powerful tool for achieving desirable, user-friendly, and economically viable design solutions and innovative products and services." There were two design thinking activities conducted. The activity called Saturate and Group was used as a fast-paced grouping of ideas that answered three different questions posed to a group of participants. The questions were placed on a whiteboard in a university classroom, and the questions were as follows:

1. When you hear the phrase "video blog" what do you imagine?
2. What would make you revisit a website?
3. What type of advertisements or means of promotion entice you to explore things you're unfamiliar with?

Ideas were written on post-it notes and grouped based on relevance and common themes or ideas. The Saturate and Group session generated about 140 answers to the proposed questions. The questions were not to decide exactly how the website would be built, but instead to gain knowledge about ways of attracting people to a website with which they were unfamiliar, to understand how people think about video blogs, and to get ideas about how to promote the website.

The second activity was a 10-minute sketch session where users were prompted to design a website landing page (with sub pages if desired) that would best depict The Vision and its image. The prompt asked each individual to include a way to showcase artists, provide a clear system for navigating, and to provide a color scheme for the website.

Videos were taken of each individual as they explained their concepts, but the participants requested not to have the videos shared with the public.

Video content was captured each week, including testimonials from the students, b-roll footage used to show creative moments in the space, and other content to document the development of the community and students throughout the semester.

Data were collected during meetings that gave a week-by-week synopsis of how the community developed over time. Release forms were created and signed by each active member of The Vision permitting the use of student's names, social media handles, and any content produced in the community as needed for research.

The Vision was designed as a self-structuring, prototype community. I sought to observe whether the community would take on a formal structure by the end of the five-month study period. Though design thinking did not influence the structure of the community, various activities completed during the study mimic professional design thinking methods and processes these processes included "How might we..." questions, interview preparation, and video documentation. The Vision was an informal community that encouraged minimal authority and maximum

autonomy. Students were encouraged to use their ideas to guide the development of the community.

At the end of the study, students were given a survey with questions about their experience in The Vision, its strengths and weaknesses, and ideas on how to improve the community for any future iterations. Website engagement data were collected during the final month of the study. This data included the engagement with The Vision website blogs and visitor data collected from Google Analytics.

In April, each student will be given the videos made throughout the year to keep as portfolio pieces. They will also get credit in my portfolio as the first students to participate in this study, along with their social media handles and contact information for anyone interested in contacting them.

The Vision will host a showcase for people to come see the work developed in the community, which will take place in April of 2019. Each student will perform pieces they worked on throughout the year. The showcase will be held at a local bar and will be promoted to the campus and surrounding community. The showcase will run for 60-90 minutes with a desired target audience of 50 or more. After the show, The Vision students will network and promote their work with those in attendance.

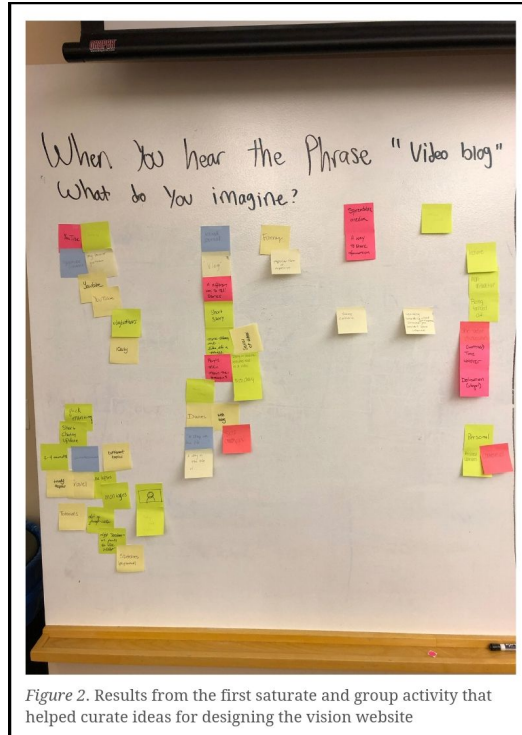
Results

This study provided three sets of results, one at the beginning of the project and two at the end:

1. Design thinking activities that assisted in building a digital platform that enticed users to engage with posted content, and to interact with the students.
2. A survey outlining the strengths and weaknesses of The Vision, and the impact The Vision had on student exploration of their passions.
3. Analytics from The Vision website that show the impact of promotional tactics conducted over a one-month period

Design Thinking Results

Each question posed during the saturate and group design thinking activity provided different different ideas for building The Vision website. For example, when asked what



participants imagined when hearing the phrase "video blog", they said short stories, *Youtube* videos,

three to four minute content, trendy topics, and videos with comedic value, as seen in Figure 2. When asking participants what made them revisit their favorite websites, they said fresh and reliable content, minimal advertisements, being knowledgeable and informative, maintaining user privacy, and consistency with design, user interface, and user experience. Last, when asking participants what types of promotions would entice them to explore things they are unfamiliar with, they said giveaways, free content, promotions that are targeted towards their interests, and campaigns that aren't annoying and persistent. They also mentioned being enticed by promotions with a story and purpose and that are unique.

The guidelines for the sketch activity seemed to confuse a few of the participants. This reduced the diversity of the designs and ideas. A commonly occurring idea was to use promotion of the students as the driver for the website. The participants emphasized how capturing students in a

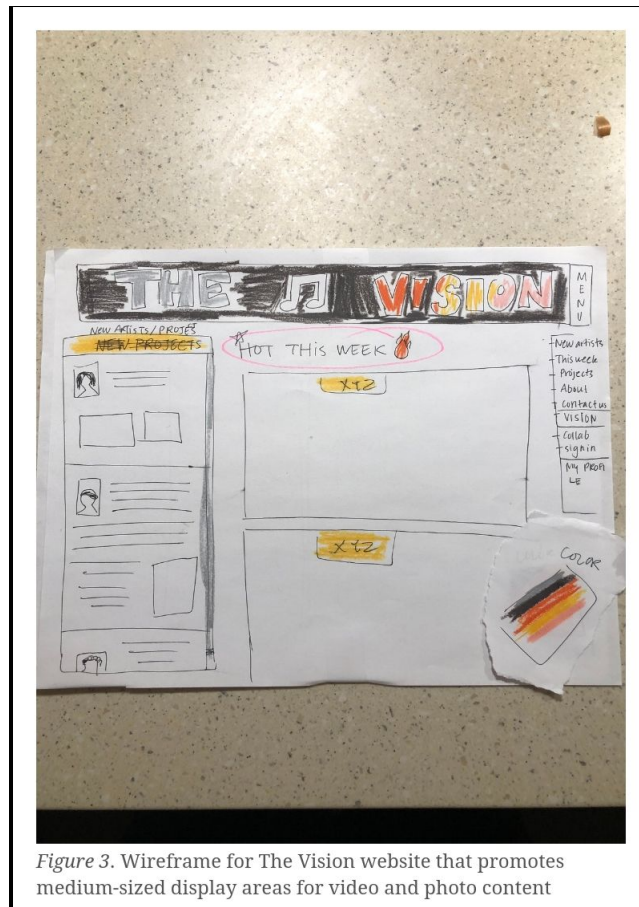
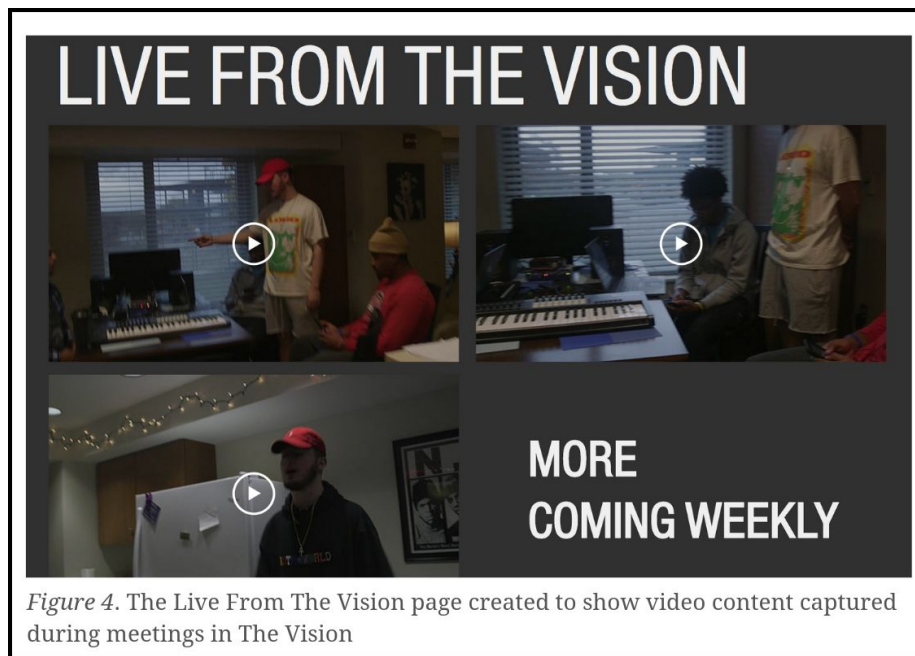


Figure 3. Wireframe for The Vision website that promotes medium-sized display areas for video and photo content

creative setting working on their craft could gain the interest of other students in the surrounding campus community.

These activities provided valuable feedback on how to get users to engage with The Vision website, the types of content to be showcased, and how to design it to attract recurring visitors (Figure 3). This design influenced a portion of the final design used on the website (Figure 4). A video gallery was updated each week with the newest video content from the week's meeting.



The Vision Community

The Vision was a grassroots community that was designed to be self-structuring from the start of the study. Students who joined the study were given autonomy and authority to shape the community.

Students in this informal community bonded with each other quickly. Each individual came to the first few meetings with ideas for types of projects and content they wanted to pursue during the five-month study. Not all ideas were explored, however, as student schedules came into conflict. This structure occasionally led to complications such as inconsistent meeting times, students being

absent during some weekly meetings, and weeks with minimal content creation. Allowing the students to be in control of the community's structure caused frustration when no one offered ideas for how to move the community further. As the facilitator, I provided the students with ideas for types of content they could create, various project ideas, and regularly provided them with goals that were attainable for each of them throughout the study.

Prior to the design thinking activities conducted for design of the website, I presented ideas to the students for feedback. Each student agreed that a dark-themed website with complimenting, eye-catching colors such as a red or dark orange would be effective. Each student was updated during the design of the website and was asked to choose images and give quotes that answered questions for blog posts on the website. Though I built the website myself, the students were allowed to give feedback and suggest changes to the site at any time.

Content was planned to be uploaded to the website on a weekly basis. However, after the video production student dropped out of the community, less video recording was done. This problem was compounded by several canceled meetings at the start of the spring semester. This student left due to scheduling conflicts and feelings of being overwhelmed. Though the student was excited about the community, he could not commit to the meeting times or the responsibilities of participation. A second student left feeling like they had nothing to contribute to or learn from the community. This student communicated through an email that the opportunity did not match their interests. A third student moved during the first week of the study. Though he appeared to be invested in the community, he reported an inability to attend meetings, and conflicts between a new schedule and the community meeting times. After two weeks in the study, the student stopped contact and participation. Four students remained after the start of the second semester. Meeting cancellations halted content creation and community development during the months of January

and February. However, each remaining student remained passionate about the community and wanted to remain a part of the community throughout the academic year.

The Vision Website Analytics

Data were collected directly from the Wix website and from Google Analytics which shows user engagement with the website in a one month period. Blog posts show the number of views and likes each blog received. Each blog gained more views than likes. Though it is impossible to

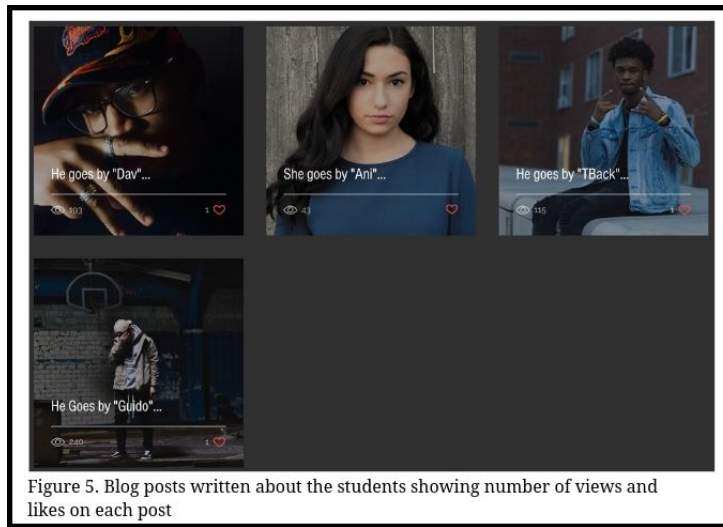


Figure 5. Blog posts written about the students showing number of views and likes on each post

determine from this data why, one factor may be the placement of the like button. As shown in Figure 5, the like button is on the front of, rather than inside, the blog post. Figure 5 also shows the difference in blog post engagement. Each student has varying numbers of visits, with some students

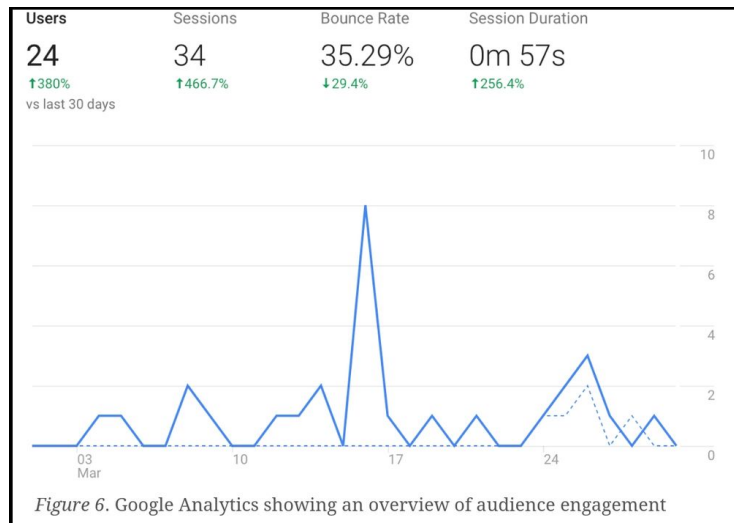


Figure 6. Google Analytics showing an overview of audience engagement

receiving many more blog views than others. The promotional efforts by each student, visitor engagement with only the blog posts of students they know, and random click engagement with minimal desire to explore all blog posts are among possible reasons. Figure 6 shows an overview of user traffic to the website. During the one month data gathering period, only 34 people visited the vision website. Figure 7 shows the platforms in which the website was visited. Majority of users

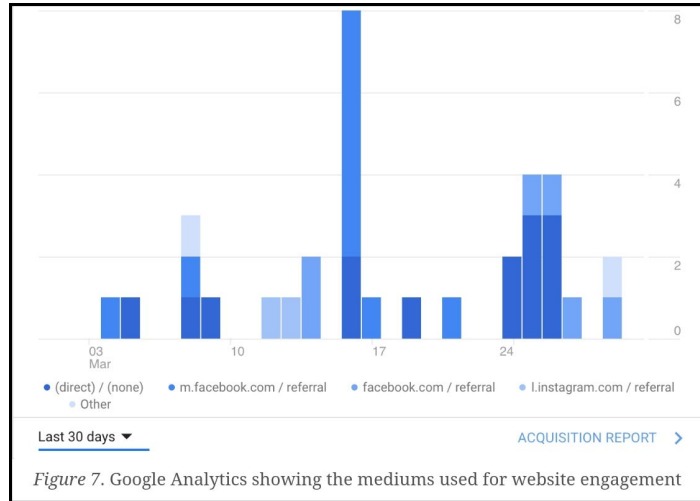


Figure 7. Google Analytics showing the mediums used for website engagement

visited the website from a link posted on Facebook, primarily on the desktop web version of Facebook. Figure 8 shows the active users on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Figures 6 and 8

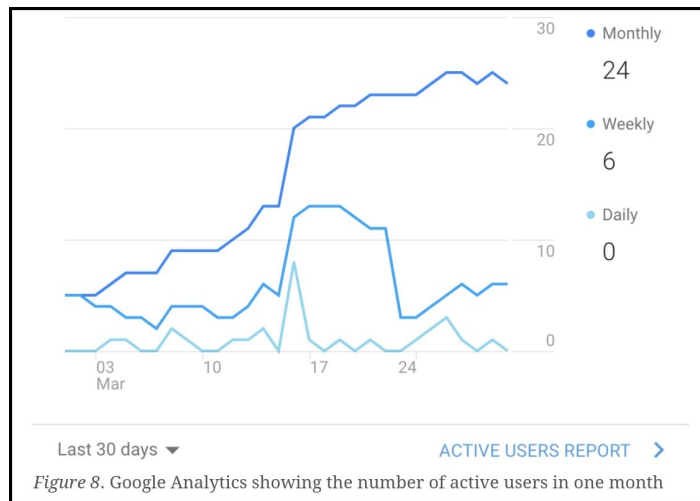


Figure 8. Google Analytics showing the number of active users in one month

show that when the website was promoted on social media, more people were likely to visit rather than when no promotional efforts were used to drive website engagement.

Post-Study Survey Results

A survey of six questions given to The Vision students provide insights about their experiences during the study, ways they believe future communities could be built, and if they see themselves in a professional career relative to their passions. Each participant is referred to by the identifiers P1 through; P4.

Q1: What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “creative community”?

A majority of the answers said idea sharing with others is a driver for creative communities. P1 noted, “I think of a group of people that is open to each other’s ideas and not afraid to let their environment and state of mind influence the art they create.” Each student was given full autonomy and was encouraged to think freely and explore all the ideas that they had. Content produced was not restricted other than what might be offensive towards a person, group of people, or a place.

Q2: Does The Vision align with what you believe to be a “creative community”?

Each individual answered yes to this question. P3 noted, “Yes we all share what we create with each other but it would be nice to have more people in the group.” The Vision went from seven members to four members over the course of the study. Surveys were not sent to the individuals that had left The Vision.

Q3: Have you ever been a part of something similar to The Vision since coming to college?

Each student answered no to this question. P4 wrote “I was apart of a music review group but not one I could show my own work.” None of the students have had experiences with a structured environment that allowed them to showcase their work or collaborate others. This was verbally reinforced by the students throughout the study. P3 said that they also never experienced anything like this prior to college, stating “No I haven’t, and not many people where I’m from really made music and were serious about it.”

Q4: Has being a part of The Vision influenced any increases or decreases in your artistic exploration?

Survey answers showed that each student felt a growth in their artistic exploration. P2 commented, “definitely increase- it allowed me to expand my own artistry by learning from others and how they are trying to become the best version of themselves.” An answer from P3 supported this claim, noting that “I definitely think listening to what music other people around me and in similar situations as me has influenced me. Hearing new music is always cool.” P4 wrote that their exploration increased because “It definitely has opened my mind to a lot more sounds and ideas.”

Q5: What would have to be added or removed from future creative communities similar to The Vision to enhance student experiences, if anything at all?

Participants P2 and P4 responded that having more collaborative artworks would have been influential. The small number of members in the community affected the experience of The Vision. P3 noted that “I think more people would help because it’s just more perspectives.” P1 responded, “[I] didn’t attend too many meetings to be able to answer this that well but everything went smoothly and worked good when I was there.” Absence affected meeting abilities for The Vision due to schedule conflicts and other non-disclosed reasons.

Q6: Are there any benefits or drawbacks to having creative communities similar to The Vision on college campuses?

P1, P3, and P4 mentioned the benefit of being able to meet people who they may not have met without being a part of the community. P1 stated, “I think it encourages people who may not necessarily be majoring in music to keep in touch with their inner artist and find others who are doing the same.” P4 responded that finding other driven artists on campus is difficult, but that being a part of a community of artists helped solve this frustration.

Q7: Do you see yourself in a professional career relative to your artistic passion?

Each participant said that they see themselves pursuing their passions after college. P4 said, “yes I see myself doing this as a lifestyle as long as I want.” No participant answer indicated The Vision as a reason for their desire to use their passions professionally. Other participants said yes with no reasoning for why or how.

The students created material that people inside and outside of the community could engage with. This included introductory video interviews of each student that explain how they developed their passions, and videos that showed collaboration between the students.

The students originated the idea of shooting mini video episodes each week that would be posted on the website for people to follow along with community development. The students also wanted to create a short film as the year-ending piece for The Vision that will be released in the spring.

Discussion

Future Studies

This study began with a research question: Is it possible to build a community around talented students to help drive creativity, collaboration, and artistic growth, all of which can be seen through digital storytelling? Results demonstrate that the answer is yes. However, there is room for iteration and improvement in the project design.

First, invitations to participate in a study like this must be clearly written with all details provided for potential participants. Participants from The Vision received word-of-mouth and email invitations to join the study. However, the participants explained their confusion about the purpose of the study during its first weeks.

Second, the number of participants in the study will affect how the community functions. The Vision began with seven members and ended with four. One may argue that a small-sized community like The Vision establishes closer relationships between participants. However, participants said that though it was great to build relationships with other artists, having more members in the community might have made the experience better and increased collaboration with different types of artists. Future studies should increase the number of participants to test the impact on participant relationships.

Third, the facilitator of a grassroots creative community should decide during the first stages of creation what the processes they will use to structure the community will be. The Vision took on a self-structuring process that allowed the community to form itself and grow based on student involvement. The Vision did implement a number of design thinking processes to inform aspects of its creation and function. For example, in the beginning phases of the study, “How might we” questions were used to produce a working hypothesis. I conducted participant interviews to help give the study direction and purpose. Last, video content was gathered throughout the entirety

of this study to capture moments from The Vision that show outcomes from building the community. None of these design thinking processes were pre-selected when deciding on how to structure the community, but each of the examples above show that these design thinking processes can be useful when building communities such as The Vision.

Fourth, having a website that explains the purpose of a grassroots community is helpful when looking to spread awareness about the community to a wider public. Though I did receive a lot of suggestions and edits from the students and external editors, the website was a product of my vision for the community. The task became much more daunting than expected, but the reward of showcasing the students was ample reward. The students were very happy to be showcased on a real website and immediately promoted it on their social media accounts after the site was published.

The design thinking sessions that helped guide the design of the website provided great ideas for how to make the website attractive, engaging, and efficient for promoting the community. A lot of ideas were collected, however only a small number of the ideas were used in the final product. A longer study duration would have allowed me to explore the other ideas that came from design thinking sessions. A second facilitator to keep the website updated and to look for ways to improve the website throughout the duration of the project would also be helpful.

Using a Wix template limited full customization of the website whereas a website that I coded and designed from scratch might have allowed for a more customized experience. I am not a software engineer, so producing my own website would have been prohibitive.

The website created more stress than expected though. Prior to releasing the website, Google Analytics had not been connected to the website which left a month of website activity unaccounted for.

Promoting the website was an uphill battle. It took more than sending out the link to the website to external parties. It required face-to-face explanations of what The Vision was, why it is important, and encouraging people to visit the website. I recommend future grassroots communities develop a supporting website that showcases the community and its participants, but that a lot of attention is given to that website from the beginning to the end of the study.

Finally, universities should find ways to create or support communities similar to The Vision. Results showed that none of the participants had been a part of a community similar to The Vision during college. Participants felt a sense of belonging and ownership in their community. Participants explained that having creative communities on campus allows students to explore their extracurricular passions. Universities have resources such as music studios and recording equipment for students to use. Unfortunately, these spaces are often designated for students who are majoring in music. Universities should provide creative spaces for those not pursuing their passions through their studies and support the informal learning that extracurricular creation provides.

Facilitator Conclusions

My experience with The Vision was a bit of a rollercoaster. The concept of building a community from scratch was scary, but exciting. The open nature of a creative project provided endless opportunities for developing what I believed to be a prototype for future arts communities of learning and practice.

The initial motivation for this project was to find a way to eliminate unfair pay of independent artists like myself. However, it was suggested by advisors from my masters program that building a community would have a more lasting impact on students. As I developed the idea and began reaching out to students, things became a bit overwhelming. I had thoughts run through my mind such as “will I be able to keep these students interested” and “how in the world can I

create a community with no money, resources, equipment, or space?” However, as I started finding and talking to students about my idea, I got a lot of positive responses and eventually I built a community of seven.

As mentioned in the results, three students left The Vision, two very early and one mid-way through the academic year. I felt guilty when the students left the community, believing that I had not appealed to the students looking for an outlet to explore their passions. As one student moved out of state, our communication began to fade, and eventually we lost contact. I believe that there are ways to immerse participants in a remote community, but their experience may suffer some due to indirect engagement.

Throughout the study, the students inspired me to be more creative. Listening to their music, watching them create new material, and hearing the excitement they had when talking about The Vision made me want to explore my own passions even further. I spoke to one of the students about various music production tools they used, where to find the best samples online, and we talked about the importance of stepping out of your comfort zone to create unique music. However, there were times where no content was produced and no collaboration occurred.

One of the hardest parts about building and facilitating a community was staying optimistic through the tribulations. At times, the community flourished, we listened to each other’s music and gave good feedback. But there were weeks where I noticed some of the students had no content to show. I was frustrated with not always being able to influence these students to take the next step in pursuing their passions. Conversations with students showed that it wasn’t the community that was causing them to halt their creation of new material, but the stress of their schedules and other responsibilities. Since I couldn’t solve their frustrations with the other responsibilities in their lives, I became flexible and allowed for meetings to be postponed and cancelled. I could not control

whether or not the students showed up to meetings, but for those who did show up I found ways to keep them invested in the community.

Likewise, my own schedule caused shifts in my motivation towards the middle of the study. As attendance of students to community meetings slimmed, so did my motivation to host meetings each week. This phase of the study would have benefited from having another facilitator to keep things running. Running the community with another person would have given me extra motivation to keep moving forward in the study. However, after writing the majority of this paper during the middle of the study, I was able to focus back on the students. From March through April, my time was spent planning the end of the year showcase for The Vision as well as helping the students prepare a setlist for their performance. I also reached out to film and video students interested in taping and editing the short film. It would include footage from throughout the study and from the showcase. The students became excited to participate in the showcase and to see themselves in a short film.

Watching the students claim The Vision as their own was inspiring. It showed me that building this grassroots community was successful and rewarding for myself and the students. The post-study survey results show that the students were thankful for the opportunity to be a part of the first student-driven creative community on campus and that it provided them with relationships they don't think they would have found otherwise.

Having the students bring their own creative tools such as computers, speakers, cameras, and instruments was also beneficial. The students didn't have to worry about damaging university property, and were able to teach each other how to use different types of tools. I influenced students to explore different skills throughout the study, having them conduct video interviews of each other or take video during different meetings. For those who were interested in music

production, I had the students who were music producers show everyone how to build a song from scratch, while adding in my own expertise on how to use drum machines.

The Vision also had some failures. These occurred as students left the community and as student attendance slipped during some weeks. Building a community alone was hard, and there were aspects of the study that would have benefited from more facilitation. However, the successes outweigh the failures. Students are looking for ways to invest in their passions, yet universities haven't provided students with resources for creating, collaborating, and growing artistically with their peers. The Vision proves that building creative communities on college campuses is both achievable and beneficial for student growth. Universities should provide students with opportunities that encourage them to embrace their passions and learn how use them professionally, regardless of their major field of study.

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