

Arts in Context

– Summative Report –

I have divided this summative report of the course *Arts in Context* into the following three sections:

1. ***What I did in this course***
2. ***What I discovered through taking this course***
3. ***What my next steps are based on the information I learned in this course***

What I did

I was able to accomplish a lot of things in this course that I believe contributed greatly to my understanding of the field of arts-related initiatives and non-profits. One of the first assignments I did was a SWOT analysis of the well-known arts organization Silkroad. I chose Silkroad because of the similarities I found between what they have done and what I am hoping to do with my own organization, specifically in terms of tying together the arts, education, and cross-cultural exchange. Although Silkroad's initiatives revolve around music, I have been using the organization as a model for what I am hoping to do with film, which is also a process-based, collaborative endeavor.

One of the quotes on the organization's website encapsulates a goal I have for my own organization: "A primary goal of Silkroad is to help students understand and develop an empathy for the perspectives that shape cultures and how they are similar to and different from the students' own cultures. The name "Silkroad Connect" captures the essential spirit of the

program: to help students connect to their own interests and curiosity; to other cultures; to their own learning; to their peers via collaborative work in the arts; and to the community beyond school as they share their work publicly."

I also had the opportunity in this course to write my first ever grant proposal, which was for the RISD GS Grant. Following the format of what was asked, and using two former MA students' proposals as a guide, I crafted a 12-page proposal which included the following:

- Cover page
- Goals and outcomes
- Project narrative
- Schedule
- Budget request
- Narrative biography
- CV

Although I didn't end up receiving the grant, it did allow me to go through the grant-writing process, which is something that will undoubtedly help me as I move forward into the future with my own organization. I was able to use a lot of the skills I had learned in other TLAD courses throughout the year to formulate my ideas and come up with a set of goals and outcomes which determined the direction of the proposal. It also gave me the chance to think more critically about budgeting, scheduling, and how to promote myself as both an artist and an educator. I have since been able to use my proposal to organize the workshop I will be holding this July, which will bring a small group of high school students from Japan to the US for a cross-cultural filmmaking camp.

In order to obtain information about a variety of different arts organizations I was investigating, I designed a document called an Initiative Overview, which was modeled off of a document I designed for my Wintersession ISP used for gathering information about different youth filmmaking organizations. The Initiative Overview was formulated in a way that would provide me with the most pertinent information regarding cross-cultural arts initiatives so that I could more smoothly move forward with my own. I divided the Initiative Overview into different sections that would allow me to understand things such as:

- Mission
- Distinguishing attributes
- Operating locations
- How the arts are integrated into the program
- Major learning objectives related to the arts
- How cultural exchange is integrated into the program
- Major learning objectives related to cultural exchange
- Outreach and promotion
- Funding and operations
- Evolution of initiative and how it has adapted

Although I decided not to use the document for collecting data, since I found it to be too constraining, it did allow me to organize certain ideas and think more deeply about things I will need to consider when developing my own organization.

I produced a collection of key questions that I was able to work from when interviewing people from the different organizations and initiatives I visited. These questions helped me obtain the most essential information, while allowing for more open-ended answers that could lead to further information I wasn't expecting to gather. The following are some of the key questions I asked founders, educational directors, and other staff working at the organizations I had contact with:

- "How would you describe the culture of your organization?"
- "How do you feel the element of cultural exchange is embedded in your program?"
- "What did you have in mind when you structured your board and how has it changed?"
- "Do you have any for-profit ventures?"
- "What do participants come away with?"
- "What is the value of partnerships to your organization?"
- "What do you imagine your program will evolve into?"

I only had the chance to conduct interviews with a small number of organizations, but I compiled a much longer list of organizations and individuals through my research that I plan to reach out

to in the future. The list I created includes the name of the organization, contact information, and a short blurb of how I might take advantage of their resources. The following is an example of one:

- The Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles - <http://www.janm.org/> / <http://www.janm.org/projects/usjapan/>
 - They have programs that “explore the connections between the US and Japan.” Could be a great organization to reach out to for a future connection and also to see what they’re doing in terms of using art to bridge the divide since they’re a museum

As far as field work is concerned, I had the opportunity to visit several organizations for tours and interviews to find out more about their initiatives which, again, bear similarities to what I am hoping to do with my own. I visited the following organizations during the Spring semester:

- Japan Society of Boston (<http://www.japansocietyboston.org>)
- Whitfield-Manjiro Friendship Society (<http://www.whitfield-manjiro.org>)
- New Urban Arts (<http://newurbanarts.org>)
- Give Me 5 (<http://giveme5ri.org>)

I also managed to set up a few telephone interviews with people working at organizations I was particularly interested in but unable to visit:

- Gakko Project (<https://www.gakkoproject.com>)
- Plural + (<https://pluralplus.unaoc.org>)

Making connections with some of these organizations was an invaluable part of the course experience as I got to not only gather information which will inform my own program, but also establish some connections which may prove to be influential in the future.

What I discovered

Through all of the work I engaged in during the course, I was able to learn a great deal about the field of non-profit arts organizations that seek to combine initiatives related to education and cross-cultural exchange. Most importantly, my findings have helped me sharpen my perspective and realign my goals in a way that I believe will make my own organization more viable and sustainable once it is set up. For one, I was able to find out more about the sheer diversity of organizations that, in some way or another, have similar goals to my own. I learned about how many of them present themselves and operate in various ways according to their short-term goals, long-term goals, and the contexts they are embedded within.

The SWOT analysis I conducted for Silkroad gave me the chance to do a deep dive into an initiative I was particularly interested in, and see how they have managed to grow and sustain themselves throughout their 20-year history. Perhaps the most difficult challenge a non-profit organization has is staying afloat, and discovered that the following are just some of the key factors that can help them achieve that:

- Good website with clearly stated goals and transparency
- Having a unique and distinguishable brand
- Reliable board with frequent meetings to determine direction
- Strong partnerships (many organizations rely on a cycle of partnerships)
- Social media outreach

I realized early on the importance of having a broad enough mission that can allow an organization to maintain its key objectives but also change and pivot according to the times. Overstructuring an organization according to overly specific goals and outcomes can make it more difficult to be available for certain kinds of funding and adapt in a field which is constantly in flux. I also learned during my meeting at Give Me 5 about network structures which allow organizations to operate at a more heterarchical level for a smoother exchange of ideas and a greater ability to stay nimble.

I had always thought that “non-profit” meant that an organization was only allowed to maintain its status if it didn’t engage in any for-profit ventures, but I realized that almost all successful organizations do this in order to survive. I learned about some of the for-profit ventures for the

organizations I connected with like the Japan Society of Boston and Gakko Project, some of which include merchandising, hosting special events, and ancillary educational programs that charge a fee. This has helped me alter the direction of my own organization, and helped me think about how I might integrate for-profit ventures into the core of my program, possibly in the form of summer filmmaking workshops or other kinds of educational programs.

I also learned in this course about different kinds of residency programs, and have now considered the possibility of tying a residency of some kind into my organization, which will most likely be based on the farm that I now live on. I have also realized more clearly how I might integrate a more nature-oriented component into my curriculum, where students could explore natural areas through filmmaking exercises.

What I will do

Although my mission of establishing a cross-cultural youth filmmaking organization remains much the same, the overall concept has changed since the beginning of the semester. The organization I initially had in mind was geared more specifically toward encouraging youth (primarily from the US and Japan) to understand each other's cultures through the act of making films together. The mission has since become much broader, and is now focused on using the medium of film, whether through making or viewing, as a tool for building bridges and bringing people from different "cultures" together and engendering a heightened awareness and sensitivity of each other's perspectives. In this case, "culture" refers not only to those of distinct nationalities and ethnicities, but also those belonging to distinct environments such as urban and rural, public schools and private schools, and others as well. This also means that the goal is to not only connect youth through film, but also adults and institutions of different cultures that are involved in the program as well.

I have not yet settled on the structure of my organization, but I have moved away from a stronger focus on having my organization operating within different schools around the world. Although I am hoping to set my program up within different educational institutions, I have realized that it may make more sense for it to operate mainly outside of schools. I now believe

that having it function as several different arms within the same overarching structure would make the most sense, since it would allow for greater flexibility and experimentation, and possibly more opportunities for income. The following are some of the arms I am considering:

- In partnership with different sites that would allow students to engage in both interior and exterior filmmaking explorations specific to certain locations
- Year-long programs which are more comprehensive (in or out of school)
- Summer camp programs related to specific themes
- Weekend programs related to specific themes

Depending on how challenging it is for me to get my organization up and running, I may also decide to launch it under the umbrella of another arts organization which has goals very similar to my own. I have come to understand the advantages and disadvantages of taking an approach like this and I will decide whether or not to do this once I make further progress with the foundational elements of my program.

The knowledge I have learned in this course will be put into action in a number of different ways this summer. The first of these will be to set up a website which outlines the projected capacity of my organization and what I hope to do as I move forward. I believe that formulating and designing a website will give me the chance to funnel everything I have learned into a working database that I can continue to revise and update as I shift my goals and objectives moving forward. I am going to consider it the culminating project for the year, which ties in everything else I have worked on and learned throughout my year at RISD related to my thesis and other coursework.

I have also organized two individual cross-cultural filmmaking workshops which will take place this summer. The first of these will be a five-day workshop involving a group of high school students from Japan who will come to New England and team up with a group of high school students from America. They will engage in group-based filmmaking explorations at several different locations in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, which will give them the chance to interact with each other through producing a number of short films. This workshop is detailed in the GS grant proposal I submitted in March. The second of these will be a week-long workshop involving high school students attending the filmmaking program at the Refugee Dream Center

in Providence. Students of different nationalities will have the opportunity to produce a number of short films together.

I will be putting the knowledge and skills I have learned throughout the year to use by designing and facilitating these workshops, which I am considering pilots for my own organization. They will allow me to test new ideas and better understand how I might navigate my program in a way that meets my main objectives and serves those involved with greater impact and consequence. I will be documenting both workshops in a variety of different ways, and producing videos which I will use for promotion to be uploaded onto my website and available for all to see.