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## SPECIAL ISSUE

The eLearning Literacy for Suddenly Online -  
Voices from the Field

## GUEST EDITORS:

J. D. Wallace, Brian Burton, Robert Chandler, Douglas Darby

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Suddenly Online Professional Development Pedagogy: End-of-Semester Showcasing in GameJolt and Animal Crossing: New Horizons

Article Info	Abstract
<p data-bbox="256 695 553 835">Christopher W. Totten, M.Arch. Kent State University Tuscarawas</p> <p data-bbox="203 1129 602 1291"><b>Keywords:</b> Games in the Classroom, Digital Exhibitions, Social Media, Game Design, Community Engagement, Game Development, Showcase, Suddenly Online</p>	<p data-bbox="669 663 1425 961">The cancellation of the Spring showcase for the Game Prototyping and Animation and Game Design Senior Capstone courses at Kent State University fundamentally changed these courses' pedagogy. This showcase is an opportunity for students to practice vital professional practice skills, such as displaying and promoting work to audiences, with instructors grading students on how they manage these tasks. "Suddenly-online" meant potentially losing both practice and assessment in courses that otherwise emphasize professional development.</p> <p data-bbox="669 982 1425 1276">This article tells how these courses adapted to their new all-digital reality through platform case studies and industry best-practices for marketing and event organization. Students and faculty organized BlatherCade, an online game event that used GameJolt, a digital marketplace for independent games, and the Nintendo Switch game <i>Animal Crossing: New Horizons</i>. This article provides a post-mortem of the event, highlighting challenges and successes of working with these platforms, and suggests best-practices for future work in this area.</p>

Totten, C. W. (2020). Suddenly online professional development pedagogy: End-of-semester showcasing in gamejolt and animal crossing: New Horizons. *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, 21 (3), 82-101.

Kent State University's Animation Game Design (AGD) program serves two hundred eighty-three students in two concentrations, Animation and Game Design, with all classes being offered at Kent State's Kent, Stark, and Tuscarawas campuses. Students in the Animation concentration study the history, concepts, and methods of 2-dimensional (2D) and 3-dimensional (3D) animation; as well as motion graphics, which is the making of animated logos, and visual effects. Students in the Game Design concentration study the history, concepts, and methods of non-digital and digital game production, as well as the role that games and interactivity have in society. Students in these concentrations each take a core set of classes, which cover topics shared between the two such as 3D modeling and animation, storytelling, and media history. Vital to both concentrations is group critique and showcases, events where student work is displayed publicly and given feedback so that students might use the lessons learned from a project in their future works. These critiques and showcases occur both during in-class presentations and via public events, which include yearly Fall art show and the end-of-semester showcases in the Fall and Spring.

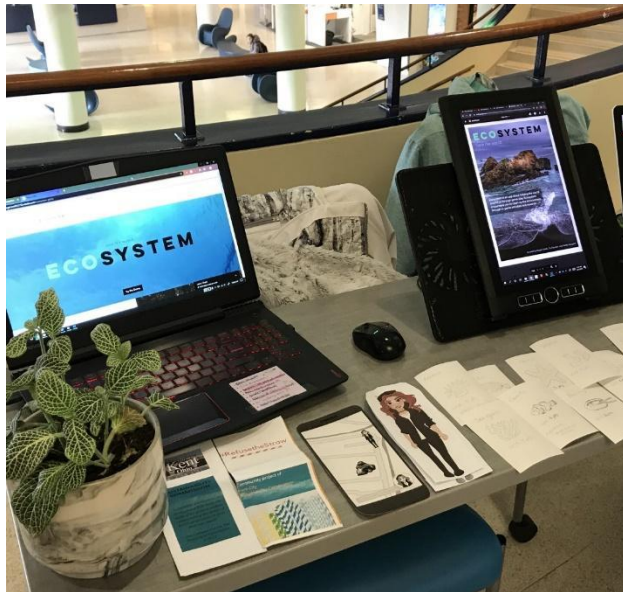
### PEDAGOGY

Two particular courses for upper-level students (third and fourth year), the Special Topics: Game Prototyping course and the Senior Capstone course, make these events a vital part of their pedagogy. These courses are patterned after courses in the arts and in architecture, themselves descendants of the introductory *Vorkurs* course at the famous Bauhaus school of design (Lerner, 2005). These courses incorporate free exploration of materials and tools rather than directed tutorials into their pedagogy (Prager, 2015). The end of semester showcase is an important part of many studio-art-styled curricula, from the commercial and fine arts to new media disciplines such as game design. In

this format, students put work on view in publicly accessible spaces for audience members and faculty to appreciate; in the case of games and animation, they also mimic film festivals, museum events, and conventions where professionals promote their work, an important part of professional practice (figure 1) (Dreskin, 2015). These events lastly provide an emotional release: a celebration of the end of the semester and the work accomplished by students. These environments allow students to practice showcasing without the intense pressures that come with professional events. As such, instructors grade students not only for the completeness of their animations and games against a project rubric, but also on how they compose their booth space. This includes criteria such as how the students interact with visitors, and how they use the event as part of a larger marketing strategy (figure 2).



**Figure 1** *The Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) Arcade. This is an example of the types of exhibitions that Kent's end-of-semester showcases try to mimic. Photo credit: Bruce Guthrie, Smithsonian American Art Museum.*



**Figure 2** A student booth from the Fall 2019 Games for Education class. The students who created this game, which guides players towards environmentally friendly habits, decorated their booth thematically and included concept art and artifacts from their research.

### ***The Switch to Virtual Events***

The importance of this event and those like it is why the “suddenly online” environment of the Spring 2020 semester, during which many schools went to completely online instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, posed a challenge for students’ professional development. Gone was not only a cathartic celebration of the semester’s end, but also major parts of students’ skill-building and how the course was evaluated. One option would have been to excuse students from this element of the course, but that was an unpopular choice. It was felt that students from the socially distant semester should not lose out on professional development opportunities for something that was out of their control. Faculty, aware through social media of ongoing efforts at other institutions

(metasynthe, 2020) to move their own showcases online, saw an alternate solution in holding an online event at which the students could show their work.

The digital media industry has no shortage of tools for showing works through virtual and online interfaces, and many were being adopted by academic programs as a means to hold their own programs’ showcases. Many programs utilized streaming platforms such as Twitch – a social media site that allows users to broadcast live footage of video games – to show student artworks (NYUGameCenter, 2020). Others, such as Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI)’s Games and Simulation Arts and Sciences program held their showcase, called GameFest, through the virtual reality program Sansar (RPI, 2020), which allowed users to socialize in a 3D environment and watch videos of the students’ work.

Museums and other cultural institutions were taking their operations online as well. The British Library created a virtual tour through the Bitsy game engine, a program that lets users make simple retro game styled environments that multiple users can access at one time (“The British Library launches unique take on virtual tour,” 2020). The Pittsburgh-based LIKELIKE gallery and arcade created an online gallery, LIKELIKE Online, that allowed multiple users to view the games on display at one time and interact with one another (Robertson, 2020). Rather than show videos, LIKELIKE Online allows visitors to directly access the sites where its digital artworks might be downloaded and was released open source so that it might be used by other institutions and galleries (Pedercini, 2020). The Monterey Bay Aquarium alternatively used an existing video game to connect to patrons: *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, a Nintendo Switch

game released during the early part of the COVID-19 lockdown in the United States. Monterey Bay Aquarium staff gave virtual tours of *Animal Crossing's* in-game aquarium (Treese, 2020), telling viewers about the real-life animals depicted within. Observing these ongoing efforts as case studies, the Kent State faculty set out to find a solution that would fit their own spring semester showcase and potential future exhibitions.

### ***Virtual Event Platform Case Studies***

Platforms were evaluated on a basis of accessibility, ease of use for the organizers, public appeal, accessibility for audiences, and whether the students' work could be accessed from within the platform. These platforms were also evaluated on whether they would provide opportunities to transition the marketing and showcasing pedagogy of these classes from real-world event-based promotion to a pedagogy that furthered students' literacy with online social media promotion.

Faculty also wished to maximize their use of digital platforms by using them to create positive creative communities. While finding a solution to their suddenly online context was first priority, faculty identified other opportunities for these digital platforms to facilitate collaboration (Marlatt, 2018). Digital platforms empower students to contribute meaningfully to digital spaces, transform meanings of works, or collaborate via social functions (Pigozzi, 2020). The concept of "hanging out, messing around, and geeking out" or HOMAGO (Ito, Baumer, Brittanti, and Cody, 2019) was of

particular interest, as digital social and play spaces are built to facilitate meaningful interactions between players, which game designers call "emergent behaviors" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). These emergent behaviors are a key feature of many digital games and positive social behaviors among players may be fostered by building social structures within online communities devoted to the games (McGonigal, 2010; Topo, 2015.)

With these factors in mind, the platforms chosen for evaluation were the Habboon social media platform, the 3D art gallery online game *Occupy Whitewalls*, LIKELIKE Online, and *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. The faculty also considered strategies which used multiple platforms at one time, such as New York University's (NYU) use of Habboon for gatherings and Twitch to show student works.

### **Habboon**

*Habboon* is a website where users manage and explore virtual "hotels" where they can chat with other users. The interface runs within a web browser on the browser's Adobe Flash Player plugin and shows users' pixel-art-styled avatars in an axonometric view (figure 3.) Players are able to create and customize their own rooms within the hotel from hundreds of customization options including wall and floor styles, furniture, plants, and even creatures. Users are given access to one another's rooms either by having their rooms posted publicly (which would allow any user to visit) or by exchanging codes for private rooms.



**Figure 3** A hotel lobby in Habboon, showing multiple active and idle user avatars.

Habboon's main advantages are its customization options and existing infrastructure – event organizers can rely on the existing features of the website to hold their events. Likewise, the site has an appealing art style which would have a thematic fit with the game development courses involved with the Kent State showcase. During the faculty's experimentation creating their own room within Habboon, they felt that the customization options were simple enough that a gallery could be made within a few days by an experienced computer user. For this reason, faculty felt that Habboon could be a good tool for exploring the HOMAGO concept, where students could create and modify spaces as they saw fit in response to ideas from their areas of study.

Despite this ease of use for organizers, the site was felt to be inadequate for the showcase based on several factors. The first was the site's small user-base. During tests, faculty observed only six hundred to eight hundred users online at any given time. Compared to a site like Twitch, which reported an average of 1.44 million

concurrent viewers as of March 2020 (Iqbal, 2020), this is a much smaller potential audience. Likewise, access to the site required users to enter user information, build a profile, and have Adobe Flash Player installed, which is increasingly unsupported by web browsers. The site could be useful for engaging the students directly, but held little promise for introducing the public to the students' works. Lastly, there were no observed options for accessing student works from within Habboon. This meant that it would be of little use as part of a broader demonstration of how to market digital media works.

### **Occupy White Walls**

*Occupy White Walls* is a 3D massively multiplayer online game in which players can build their own art galleries from a collection of over two-thousand architectural assets and fill them with art for other players to see and comment on (figure 4). The game is currently in an Alpha (pre-release) state and is available for free on the Steam digital game marketplace. The game includes a collection of over six-thousand artworks including eighteenth and nineteenth century



art, as well as contemporary works (StikiPixels, 2018b). The game also includes an artificial intelligence (AI) named DAISY that learns players' taste in art and makes recommendations for additions to their collections based on common elements. The

AI does not distinguish between well-known "canonical" works and lesser known ones. Art is acquired through an in-game currency, called Pixels, given to players as their galleries attract visitors. (StikiPixels, 2018a)



**Figure 4** A screenshot of *Occupy White Walls*, showing a user-made gallery. Image source: *Occupy White Walls Player Galleries*: <https://www.oww.io/?pgid=jcrs1txj-14e93374-4586-412f-a2c3-a6448e246311>

Of the platforms evaluated, *Occupy White Walls* was the most graphically sophisticated, including realistic 3D rendering and an impressive selection of pre-made architectural and artwork assets. It featured a simple gallery-building interface, making it highly usable by organizers. However, all users – including potential organizers and visitors to the showcase – had to sign up for a user account and sit through a tutorial on how to use the software that could not be skipped. The game also required a twelve-gigabyte download, adding to concerns about audience and student accessibility for those with low-powered computers. Most disqualifying of

all was the fact that user-created artworks could not be uploaded in the current Alpha version: the developers have said that this is a priority when the platform reaches the Beta stage. While the platform has great potential as a tool democratizing the act of art curation, in its current state it was impractical for Kent State's Animation and Game showcase.

#### **LIKELIKE Online**

*LIKELIKE Online* is the creation of Paolo Pedercini, one of the founders of the LIKELIKE Arcade in Pittsburgh, PA, a "neo-arcade/playful arts gallery" specializing in showcasing independent and

experimental games and other digital artworks (figure 5) (LIKELIKE, 2020). It was built as a reaction to the COVID-19 crisis and is meant to be a means to keep the gallery active while the public cannot visit the gallery in-person. This platform is unique among those cited as it was built both as a specific reaction to the “suddenly

online” situation that many institutions found themselves in and for the purpose of showcasing “new media” works such as computer-generated animations, online multimedia artworks, and games.



**Figure 5** Screenshots of LIKELIKE Online, showing multiple users visiting and chatting within the online space. Image source: <https://www.molleindustria.org/blog/LIKELIKE-online/>

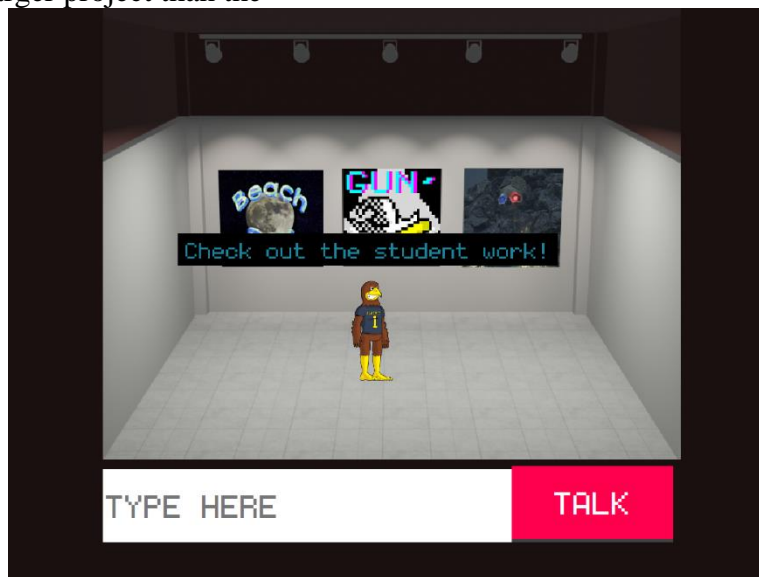
*LIKELIKE Online* is a small application, written in Javascript for web browsers, that can be embedded within a website and visited on multiple types of devices from a smartphone to a desktop computer. To visit, someone needs only to reach the site itself, type in the name they wish to go by as they explore the gallery, and select an avatar from one of many simple pixel characters; no permanent accounts are created or personal information collected. Visitors can chat via a small text window at the bottom of the interface or walk up to artworks and access them via hyperlink. These links open new browser tabs or windows showing the work’s web

page, often at a site where the work can be viewed, downloaded, or played. The tool has been offered by the creators as an open source tool via the development repository websites GitHub and Glitch, able to be used by other galleries and users for creating their own online showcases (Pedercini, 2020).

*LIKELIKE Online* is a truly remarkable tool that has garnered attention from both writers (Robertson, 2020) and museum curators. In terms of visitor accessibility and access to games, it had many of the features that the Kent State Animation and Games faculty desired for an online platform for their showcase. Though

students could not easily modify the space as they occupied it, they would be easily able to visit it and share it with friends and relatives. However, the need to “hard code” any customizations, or specify aspects of the program directly within its code, made using it a significantly larger project than the

faculty were able to take on during the brief period between shutting down and the Spring 2020 showcase. The tool impressed nonetheless and will be used to make an online version of the yearly Fall Art Show (figure 6.)

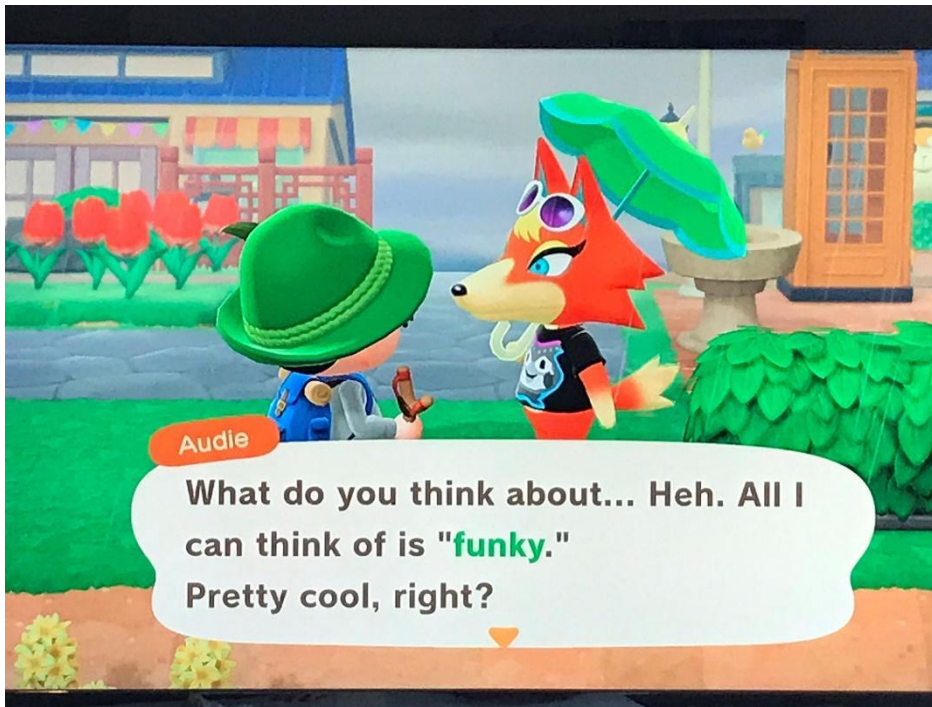


**Figure 6** *A proof of concept prototype of Kent State’s implementation of LIKELIKE Online. Some stakeholders were concerned that the pixel art style would put off casual observers more interested in state-of-the-art graphics, so a version with higher resolution art was made. All art here is a stand-in and would be made more sophisticated in the final version.*

### **Animal Crossing: New Horizons**

The final platform evaluated was *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, a commercial game published by Nintendo for their Nintendo Switch game console. *New Horizons* is the latest game in the *Animal Crossing* series, in which the player is a human who lives in a village inhabited by anthropomorphic animals and which began with the 2001 game *Animal Crossing* for the Nintendo GameCube console. Gameplay in *Animal Crossing* is above all an open-ended

social simulation where players can perform various activities in their towns such as fishing, gardening, catching bugs, and befriending other villagers. Most important for this article are the ability for players to visit one another’s villages: a feature facilitated by the Nintendo Switch’s online capabilities in *New Horizons*, and the player’s ability to customize their village with both pre-made and player-made decorative objects (figure 7).



**Figure 7** A screenshot of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* on the Nintendo Switch. The player is talking to a villager among the town square they have built with in-game materials and objects.

Players have used this ability not only to create thematic landscapes and gardens, but also art installations. Installation artist Shing Yin Khor has recreated several famous artworks within the game, including Marina Abramović's performance piece, *The Artist is Present* (Cascone, 2020). Likewise, Marie Foulston – curator of the *Design/Play/Disrupt* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London – recreated Chris Burden's *Urban Light* installation in her *New Horizons* village (Tigershungry, 2020a.) The game also has an in-game museum curated by an owl named Blathers which showcases fish, insects (Blathers hates these but displays them anyway), fossils, and classic artworks that the player finds as they explore their villages. While Blathers' museum is not customizable – it merely records pre-made creatures and objects that the player has found – users have found creative ways to use the museum

or supplement it, such as the aforementioned guided tours from the Monterey Bay Aquarium or by turning their houses (fully customizable spaces) into independent galleries (Tigershungry, 2020b).

In terms of ease of use for organizers, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* had perhaps the easiest-to-use interface, symptomatic of its role as a commercial game made for mass audience-consumption. Students' full animations or games could not be shown in it or even linked from it, but students would be able to create art representing their works via an in-game paint tool. This art could be displayed on canvases or on in-game clothing. Art could also be shared as QR codes through a smartphone app that would load the images into a user's copy of the game, and fans had created tools for translating photos into QR codes that could be read by the game (Lee, 2020).

This customization was not as bespoke to the needs of showing games as LIKELIKE Online, but *Animal Crossing's* key advantages were its ease of use and its massive user base. The game released on March 20, 2020 – several days into many US States' COVID-19 shutdowns. In this way, a game about living a peaceful, carefree life of fishing, bug-catching, and making animal friends was perfectly timed: it sold 11.7 million units in its first eleven days on the market (Nintendo, 2020) and was called the “game for the coronavirus moment.” (Khan, 2020) This massive user-base translated into millions of potential visitors to see a digital showcase of the students' works and a number of popular social media hashtags with which the event could be promoted to those potential visitors. Faculty felt that this platform best allowed students to enact HOMAGO, as it was an easy place to gather not only with their classmates, but also potentially with members of the media arts industry that they hoped to attract with the showcase. They could then engage in online networking around the artwork that they had made and potentially find creative opportunities with this community outside of the event.

Even if a student could not themselves attend the showcase because they either did not own a Switch or *Animal Crossing* itself, they could participate in the promotion of the event with hashtags and links. This helped transfer one of the professional development opportunities of the in-person event, the booth management and audience engagement, to an online environment where students would participate in the event's social media management. Given these factors, *Animal Crossing* was the platform of choice for the AGD Game Prototyping and Senior Capstone end of semester showcase.

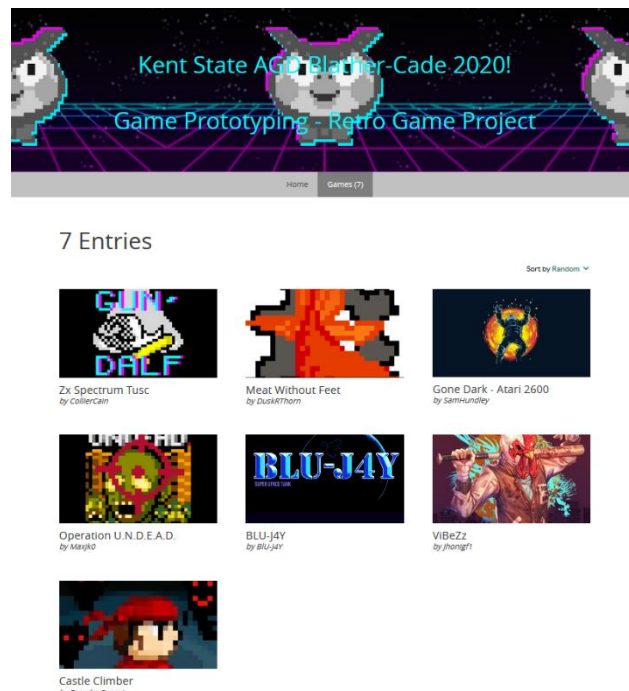
## BUILDING THE BLATHERCADE

After choosing *Animal Crossing* as the showcase's platform, the next step was to create a name for the event. Any name had to be short and simple to turn into a social media hashtag to accommodate the class's new social media-based professional development goals. The faculty had a history of working with museums and other cultural institutions to organize video game showcases such as the SAAM Arcade (Totten, 2019) and GameFest Akron (formerly the Open World Arcade) at the Akron Art Museum (“Akron Art Museum to continue Juried Game Design Showcase, GameFest Akron,” 2020), so it was decided to build the event around Blathers' museum and call the event “BlatherCade.”

The outcome of both the Game Prototyping and Senior Capstone courses were digital media projects such as games and animations that, as stated previously, were shown during the end-of-semester showcase. At the onset of the remote learning period and before *Animal Crossing* was chosen as a showcase platform, faculty had already changed requirements for the courses so that project check-ins, typically handled through weekly classroom meetings with each student group, could be handled online. Students now had to build pages for their projects on the digital market site, GameJolt, which allows creators to post blog posts about making their project. To align with student privacy laws, these pages could be set to a “private” mode, where only those with a specific link to the page could see it; many students regardless opted to have their pages publicly viewable. The faculty also created a “jam” on the site as a means of keeping track of the projects: jams are events where media works such as games or animations are made in a limited time period, similar to a hackathon.

GameJolt provides tools for organizing these events and linking game pages to the jam, which became a portal with which faculty could view all of the projects at once. Once their projects were posted, students were required to do register their projects for the jam and post weekly updates. The topics of these updates were open-ended, with faculty

advising students that consistently showing progress through new artwork, sound, screenshots, or text updates was a good way to maintain audience engagement. Once BlatherCade was established, branding for the jam page was updated so that it could direct visitors to the students' work (figure 8).



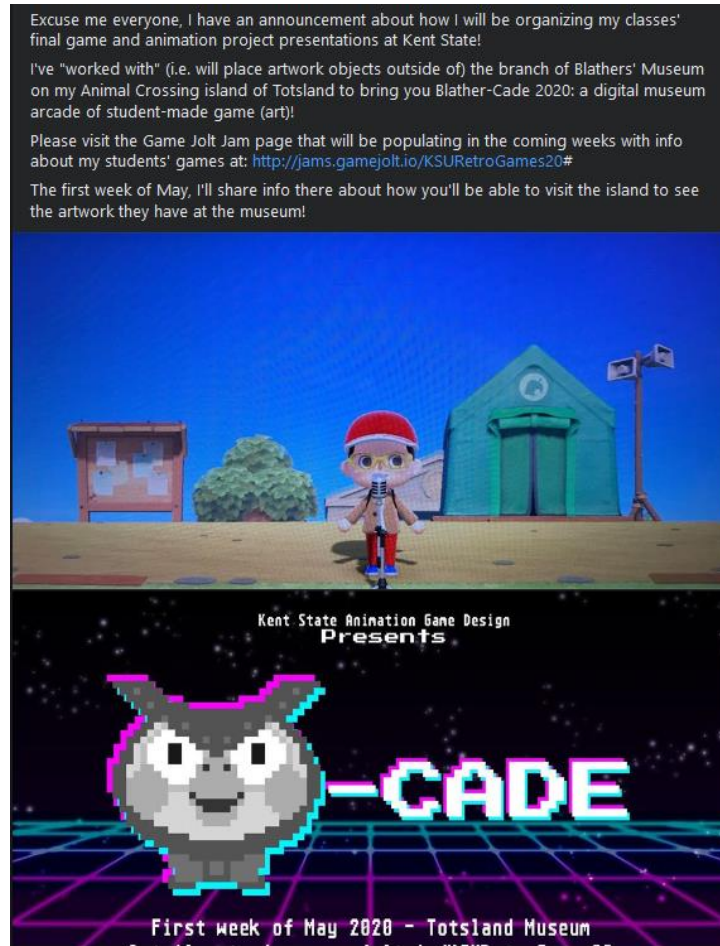
**Figure 8** The BlatherCade jam page for the Kent State Game Prototyping course. Students were required to register their projects for the jam event, which allowed faculty to access the students' project pages from one place. Students were required to post weekly updates as a means of building the skill of engaging audiences regularly.

In addition to the organizational advantages mentioned above, GameJolt offered a way to circumvent *Animal Crossing*'s weaknesses: it could be a place where audiences could access the students' projects. Through GameJolt's own social media tools that let visitors follow creators, share links to one another's projects, and post comments, students without a copy of *Animal Crossing* could also engage.

Due to its popularity and place in the COVID lockdown zeitgeist, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* offered a number of opportunities for promoting the event through in-game factors. Promotion would therefore follow two strategic paths: one would appeal to professional audiences interested in supporting student designers and the other would be to promote to a broader audience with gameplay-based

incentives. For example, the event was announced on social media by replicating the daily “announcements” that in-game character Tom Nook makes when players sign into the game (figure 9.) These posts performed well and attracted the support of

industry members who were also playing *Animal Crossing*: in-game items to help customize the showcase space, such as VR goggles and arcade game machines, were “donated” to the event through the game’s gift-giving system.



**Figure 9** The social media post announcing *BlatherCade*, which used popular imagery from the game as a means of highlighting the event.

*BlatherCade* required only one new assignment for students: to submit a 32-pixel by 32-pixel piece of artwork that could be used to represent their project inside *Animal Crossing* via the custom art tool. This avatar would be displayed outside of the museum in the same way that games are placed in

museum atria and lobbies at events like SAAM Arcade. Faculty, who were playing the game for leisure anyway, made sure to hit specific in-game benchmarks so that their village would be a more enticing place to visit: rare creatures such as the Sturgeon, which disappeared from players’ ecosystems

at the end of March, were caught and added to the museum so they could become attractions for visitors, for example.

In some ways, the Blathercade final showcase – meant to emulate the way that creators engage audiences at in-person events – became a social media campaign. Here, students could learn how creators engage audiences online through GameJolt, Twitter, and other platforms. GameJolt and *Animal Crossing* could not complete all of the goals of the showcase alone. Together they formed a toolbox that created both community and a popular place to hang out and celebrate the students' work. As with Marlatt's use of the TodaysMeet platform to facilitate literary discussion (Marlatt, 2019) and Pigozzi's use of blogs to encourage social creative writing (Pigozzi, 2020), sites like GameJolt allow creators to engage one another's works in meaningful and constructive ways. Since GameJolt is otherwise a digital marketplace where professional creators can distribute their works, contributing on this site added an additional feeling of "real world" agency as students created content for their pages and commented on others' works. *Animal Crossing*, on the other hand, formed a space rich with opportunities for students to customize the semiotic world of the game and its museum (Katz and Wallace, 2019) with their own works. They collaborated in this effort with industry members who added their own semiotic touches to the event via donations. As we will see, bringing everything together in a limited-time social media-driven event will provide meaningful

emergent interactions between student makers and the industry community.

### **BLATHERCADE OPENS**

BlatherCade took place from May 4<sup>th</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup>, corresponding with Kent State's finals week and the deadline for students to post the final versions of their projects to GameJolt (figure 10.) Online connections to the faculty village where BlatherCade was held were open between 10 AM and 2 PM US Eastern time. Connection was accomplished by connecting the game to the internet and distributing an access code, called a "Dodo Code", that let players "fly" to another's islands. All of this is accomplished via the game's internet access menu, which is represented in-game as an airport operated by dodo birds. Each day's access code was posted to the GameJolt jam page for each class, requiring visitors to visit the pages where the student games were to engage with the *Animal Crossing* portion of the event. Both students and faculty could then share the link to the page with the codes using popular *Animal Crossing*-related hashtags such as #AnimalCrossing and #DodoCodes. GameJolt even assisted with promotion of the event, sharing links to the jam page and student games on their social media and promoting what in-game events were happening that day in the village where BlatherCade was being held (figure 11). In-game events unrelated to the BlatherCade, but which could be used to make the island enticing to visitors, included visits from special vendors who sold in-game items (such as Sahara, a camel who sells rare home décor items) or the presence of rare bugs and fish to catch.





**Figure 10** An image of *BlatherCade* taken right before opening the game's internet connection on the first day of the event.



**Figure 11** GameJolt assisted in the social media campaign for the event, highlighting the event, the student projects, and in-game events that would entice *Animal Crossing* fans to visit the village where *BlatherCade* was being held.

*Animal Crossing* limits the number of visitors to a village to eight players at one time. Regardless of this restriction, the event managed to attract seventy-three visitors during the time that it was open (Totten,

2020). These visitors ranged from random visitors attracted via the #DodoCode hashtag to game developers, academics, the students themselves, and their friends. (figure 12.) Students had the opportunity to network

with several of the developers during the event via the in-game chat function. Social media posts were made throughout the week to promote the event, with the most popular

of these earning 8,097 impressions (times that a post is seen) and 678 interactions (times that a post is clicked.)



**Figure 12** A faculty member and two students – the event had a party-like atmosphere reminiscent of traditional end-of-semester celebrations.

Visitors attracted via *Animal Crossing* hashtags and not familiar with the purpose of the event would regularly stop at the arcade to ask what was going on and reacted to the answer with positivity and encouragement for the students (figure 13). Faculty also designed an in-game t-shirt for the event, which could be accessed by visiting the island's clothing shop (figure 14), as a souvenir for visitors. Associating their projects with the event increased traffic to students' project pages. Student groups that actively promoted their game during BlatherCade with associated #BlatherCade

and #AnimalCrossing hashtags received between eighty and one hundred views each as opposed to student groups who simply posted their projects, which garnered between fifteen to twenty-five views. One Senior Capstone project, a horror game called *Rose Willow*, was even featured and given a positive review by a game-focused YouTube channel (Rentner, 2020). This level of engagement was thanks to faculty and student efforts with promotion, as well as outreach done on sites like GameJolt and to members of the game industry.



**Figure 13** *Random visitors offered encouragement for the students, and student visitors (like the graduating senior pictured here) could see their work's impact beyond the classroom.*



**Figure 14** Organizers created in-game clothing to offer visitors as a souvenir that was available in the island's clothing store.

### FINDINGS AND FUTURE WORK

Despite being a quickly organized event, BlatherCade was a success. It offered not only a cathartic end to the semester like those found in in-person showcases, but also added social media management to the professional development skills that students learned during the semester. Despite the initial unpleasantness of migrating content to an online setting, “suddenly online” also led to some innovations that will be carried into future in-person teaching and which might be useful to other instructors. Using GameJolt’s jam function and requiring students to maintain project blogs was beneficial both from an information organization standpoint and as a piece of classroom instruction. Faculty could view and evaluate student projects from one location rather than trying to manage multiple links e-mailed by students, as was

the previous method. The students’ blogs were a great ancillary for in-class check-ins, helped students understand the value of online community engagement and marketing, and encouraged community engagement. Jumping on the popularity of *Animal Crossing* showed students how engaging with trends could help them build interest for their own projects if done in a novel and engaging way. As a massively popular game released not long before the showcase, *Animal Crossing* also provided an accessible social space for both collaboration and networking between students and members of game industry. Future iterations of these courses and others like them will be utilizing tools like GameJolt Jams, progress blogs, and awareness of social media trends to develop students’ social media literacy. It is believed that similar online and social media tools might be useful in other areas, and the

program is discussing its findings with other units at Kent State for potential collaboration.

On the other hand, *Animal Crossing* showed that it had some limitations as an event organization tool. As stated previously, villages could only have eight visitors at one time, which restricted the game's usefulness for events much bigger than a class showcase. Nintendo's notoriously glitchy online infrastructure added to the frustration. On some days, the event's internet connection had to be restarted several times. The game generates a new Dodo Code with each new connection, which required faculty to update the classes' GameJolt pages with the new codes frequently. The pairing of *Animal Crossing* with GameJolt was ideal for the event's core audience of technology-savvy students, gamers, and industry members, but would likely be confusing for more casual audiences. Having one place to both socialize and see the work, as is possible in LIKELIKE Online, would be ideal. For this reason, the Kent State AGD program has moved on to creating events in the LIKELIKE Online platform, including their Fall 2020 art show and building an online gallery space for the Akron Art Museum in Akron, Ohio.

Regardless of the limitations and short preparation time, events like BlatherCade show how community engagement may be built into curriculum. Skills like this are important for teaching new media artists what to do after they have actually created their projects; activities such as public releasing, marketing, and building an audience are just as vital as the creation of the work itself. Beyond the classroom, BlatherCade shows how factors of ease of use for the organizers, public appeal, accessibility for audiences, and whether

works may be accessed from within a platform might help curators and event organizers form their own exciting online digital media showcases.

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