With expanding infrastructure for telecommunications in the world today pre-service teachers can enter museums through new digital doorways. While the hardware and infrastructure exists and is readily available to many universities across the world, the problem exists as to how to fully utilize distance education technology tools to enhance the bonds between schools, students and museums.

This poster session will describe a Virtual Field Trip (VFT) project that allows public school children to experience nationally acclaimed museums such as the American Museum of Natural History via videoconferencing. The goal will be to describe the VFT project and the pedagogical and technical strategies that were applied to bring museum resources into the classroom. The roles of the university instructors and the museum instructors will be considered. Quantitative and qualitative data will be shared to describe pre-service teachers' perceptions of synchronous videoconferencing with museums and changes in their perceived ability to provide content area instruction (science and social studies instruction as well as arts education).

Virtual Field Trips to actual classrooms act like "windows into the classroom." These virtual field experiences allow pre-service students to view lessons in progress in K-8 public school classrooms. Pre-service students are able to observe teaching, learning, and assessment without having to make physical trips to the classroom. Professional Development schools have collaborated in providing these virtual field experiences for the university students. After the university students view virtual field trips, they are able to ask children and their teachers questions via videoconferencing. University professors then use these shared experiences as a basis of discussion of lesson presentation including topics such as teaching strategies used, materials, student to student interaction and teacher to student interaction. The presenters will share recorded virtual field experiences. Pedagogical and technical strategies that were applied to provide "windows into the classroom" to bring K-8 actual lessons into the university classroom will be described. We will share lessons learned and future plans for the project.