

The Second Life Teeter Totter: Highs and Lows of Teaching in a Virtual World

Is teaching and learning in Second Life (a virtual environment where each user has his/her own avatar) really an option within higher education? Yes—definitely, say these presenters. Second Life offers the feeling of being in an actual classroom where the participants experience emotions, participate in real-time discussions, complete assignments, work with peers, and become involved in activities just like in real-life face-to-face classroom settings.

This session focuses on best practices learned by two college professors who used Second Life for teaching environments to support on-line college classes. It includes:

1. Tips for getting started. (how to install SL, how to create unique avatars, orientation activities, practice opportunities for basic movements in SL, settings that work best on individual computers, etc., learn the technology well enough to teach it or create a support system for assistance during each learning experience)
2. Motivating students within the SL arena (assisting novices to SL, providing support and structure for each experience, maintaining a positive attitude about the many experiences in SL, modeling an attitude of personal growth in knowledge about and skills in SL environments)
2. Adding skills for certain tasks in SL (how to build, how to buy, how to manage inventory, how to find free items, how to teleport, etc.)
3. Adapting the curriculum to work in SL (consider experiential and interactive nature of SL, revising assignments to fit the unique nature of SL, being aware of the different emotional and experiential reactions to teaching and learning in SL, etc.)
4. Revising teaching skills to work in SL (plan for SL protocols, use multiple computers while conducting a teaching session in SL, design support for students who get behind or miss a class session, set communication rules and processes using IM, speakers, chats, and cell phones if necessary; be aware that the medium can slightly change the message in SL)
5. Evaluating in SL (assessing student performance and participation, documenting student growth in SL skills and knowledge intended in the learning session, using reflection for personal and professional growth and development, expanding options for evaluative techniques based on growing technology within SL)

Teaching in a Second Life environment brings many successes and challenges to the instructor in higher education. Facing the technological challenges of ensuring that each student has a unique avatar,