VIRTUAL worlds

ICM 500 (Special Topics), Autumn 2007
Thursdays, 15:30 – 18:15, Tator Hall 130
Facebook: "Virtual Worlds"

Instructor	**Office Hours**
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Over the last year or so, there has been a great deal of attention paid to a multi-user virtual environment (MUVE) called *Second Life*; a period of media hype that is slowly coming to a close. Despite the seeming fifteen minutes of fame enjoyed by *Second Life*, it remains an outstanding example of a genre of social computing that has a long history, and is likely to have a long future. Virtual environments are here to stay, and there is an opportunity right now for communication professionals who are able to understand and work within these environments. Those businesses and individuals who are using *Second Life* today are acquiring a set of concepts and skills that are likely to be applicable to similar environments well into the future.

This seminar is designed as a practical introduction to MUVEs, with a special focus on *Second Life*, which will be at once the place where we work, and one of our objects of study. We will be reading some of the theory surrounding MUVEs, as well as more practical literature. By the end of the semester, participants in the seminar should be not only competent residents and creators in *Second Life*, but understand the social and business dynamics of virtual worlds, and be able to plan and execute a substantial project in-world.

Materials

Since we will be meeting most frequently in a virtual environment, there are certain things that you will not necessarily need: including a parking spot. However, there are also some unusual expenses:

- The text book: Michael Rymaszewski et al, *Second Life: The Official Guide*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2007.
- A computer that can run *Second Life* and a high-speed Internet connection. *Second Life* requires a lot of graphics capability and a lot of bandwidth (see *http://secondlife.com/corporate/sysreqs.php*).
- We are only scheduled to be meeting in RL three times during the semester. However, if you plan on accessing *Second Life* from the lab, you may need to have a flash drive (small capacity is fine) to load the Second Life client onto.
- A headset. *Second Life* is currently shifting from all text to voice. It's not clear what effects this will have, but we will be experimenting with it during the semester. Good headsets are widely available, and are likely to be useful for other new online offerings in the department as well.
- While it is not necessary for you to become a paying subscriber to *Second Life*, you will want to spend some money in-world on things like clothing and tools. You should budget some reasonable amount ($30-$50) to convert into Linden dollars for your avatar to use.

Activities and Evaluation

This is a course about multi-user virtual environments, and for all practical purposes, it is also going to be conducted in a virtual environment. In some ways, it is similar to any graduate seminar: we will have readings, reflect on them, and discuss them. I will do several short presentations as well. Much of the course is designed to allow you to become familiar as a "resident" of Second Life and then as a producer in that world.

Since there is not an effective way of actually observing what each of you does in-world, I will be evaluating you on three things:

First, attendance and participation in our discussions and meetings makes up **20%** of your total grade. We will be meeting regularly, both as a group for much of the class, and then in smaller groups as we come to a close. In practice, I recognize that personal and professional obligations may get in the way of attending every single meeting, and there are infrequent problems with Second Life that may mean we are unable to meet as a group. Missing a single meeting will not affect this grade, but for each subsequent miss, the overall class grade will be reduced by 5%.

When you are there, I expect you to be engaged, active, and on-point. There is something about virtual worlds that makes distraction much easier, and so it is important to remain directed during our meetings. When there are relevant events (talks, etc.) in world, I will announce them. Please do what you can to attend these. In some cases, we may go to a talk (or invite in a speaker) rather than hold a regular discussion session.

There may be pop quizzes on the readings during the semester, which would apply toward the participation grade.

Second, I expect each person in the class to contribute to an individual public blog. I will distribute a topic, activity, or question to you post about each week. Those posts are due by Tuesday before we meet, in order to give everyone a chance to read and comment on them. Blogs will receive grades about every four weeks (three total grading periods), and in total these assignments will be worth **40%** of the final grade.

The nature of these assignments will differ from week to week. Some of these entries are expected to be short (~700 word) bibliographic essays, others will consist of a short paragraph with a video posting or a link to an object in-world. Most will be individual postings, but some can be done in pairs or groups.

The third part of the course is focused on creating a widely recognized brand in *Second Life*. We will talk in a bit more detail about the structure of this project as we approach the mid-point of the semester. Generally, you will be creating awareness of a product or service. It may be that you are also creating the product or service, but the nature of virtual environments makes that distinction a bit more difficult to make. We will be doing this in teams, from pairs all the way up to the entire class, depending on which proposals we decide to take up. The project itself will make up **40%** of the final grade.

All contributors to the project will receive the same grade for that project. However, I will be expecting weekly descriptions of what has been accomplished by each person, and so blogging grades are likely to differ according to the work done. As you can see in the schedule, we will be meeting as groups several times during the second half of the semester, and time-permitting, I will also attend those meetings.

I should note that there is a diversity of experience levels in the course, with some of you already *Second Life* experts, and some complete novices. Often this causes friction in a technologically-oriented course, but strangely even more extreme differences in writing ability often do not. I strongly encourage you to collaborate across different skill levels, as this is often the best way to come to terms with new areas.

Policies

I expect people to be open-minded and treat one another with respect. Some of the issues we will be discussing are strange, and many of the things you encounter in virtual worlds may be outside your normal experiences, and it is important to be sensitive to these cultural differences in your discussions with others in the world, and others in the course.

Attendance is required at each class meeting, real or virtual. Missed meetings will affect participants' final grades.

Please review the Quinnipiac University Academic Integrity website (*http://www.quinnipiac.edu/ x1046.xml*) for information about Academic Integrity and proper student behavior. Students are expected to be familiar with these university policies. Forms of dishonesty include:

- cheating or helping another to cheat on an exam
- using a paper authored by someone other than yourself
- plagiarizing another's written work (papers or outlines), in full or in part, including failure to properly cite all sources
- deliberately distorting information
- falsifying information (e.g., reason for absence)

Students violating the academic integrity rules will be subject to sanctions in class, usually a failing grade for the course, and will also be reported to the Academic Integrity Board.

Plagiarism takes on even more dimensions in a virtual space. You are expected to borrow and purchase items in-world, and you may even hire help, if you so choose, but it is vitally important that you make as explicitly clear as possible the provenance of these items and clearly indicate what work is your original work, and what work has been produced by others.

Second Life, like all MUVEs, has its own set of written rules and unwritten expectations for behavior. It is important that you abide by these regulations, as well as those of Quinnipiac University.

It is important that you spend enough time in-world to become skillful in manipulating it. On the other hand, especially if you have a compulsive personality, you may find that you are spending so much time in-world that it is interfering with your professional or social life. If that is the case, it is important to limit the time you are in-world. Please do contact me if you are at any point concerned about this in order to devise some strategies for countering it.

Students with disabilities who wish to request reasonable accommodations should contact: John Jarvis, Coordinator of Learning Services in the Learning Center, Tator Hall Room 119 at (203) 582-5390 or at *john.jarvis@quinnipiac.edu*. Quinnipiac University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Unless otherwise noted in an assignment or in class, work turned in after a deadline, will receive a zero for the assignment.

I am always very happy to chat not only about the topics of the course, but anything else you would like to talk about. I will be in-world for many hours each week, and I encourage you to IM or stop by. The course is small enough that I hope to spend some time chatting one-on-one with each of you throughout the semester.

Tentative Schedule

Detailed assignments each week will be distributed via *Second Life*. "SLOG" refers to the major text for the course. There will be additional (short) readings and tutorials distributed—SL is a moving target. Readings should be completed *before* our meetings. This schedule is likely to be adjusted as we move through the semester; keep a good eye on the Facebook page and announcements in the SL group.

	Topics	Readings	Due Tuesday Before
Week 1 8/30	Introduction to MUVE, SL, Course, Getting started, controls, navigating, communicating	None	Prepare for new semester!
Week 2 9/6		SLOG 1, 2, 3 Tiffany, "Starting a Second Life Business," *Entrepreneur.com* "Glimpse Inside a Metaverse," Google Tech Talks SL: Brand Marketing	Start blog Join Second Life, look around Join "Quickening," our class group in SL Initial comments on Do a "travel review"
Week 3 9/13	Avatar Psych, Demographics, Touring SL, other popular MUVEs, crafting your avatar, second self?	SLOG 4, 5 Castranova, *Synthetic worlds,* "The User" Turkle, *Life on the Screen* (Selection)	"Before & After" Avatar Makeover
Week 4 9/20	Branding, "Stuff" in SL	SLOG 6 Hemp, "Avatar-Based Marketing," HBR	Analysis of a branding effort in SL
Week 5 9/27	Unreal estate, locations & traffic, Basic Building	SLOG 7 Building tutorials TBA	Building a chair Reaction to readings
Week 6 10/4	Virtual economy, virtual architecture, more building	SLOG 10 Howe, "The Rise of Crowdsourcing," *Wired* TBA	Building a house Reaction to readings
Week 7 10/11	Project ideas, Scripting & animation, bots	SLOG 8 TBA	Scripting your chair (opt. new gesture) <200 word project idea
Week 8 10/18	Groups Prep Full Proposals	None	Work on proposal
Week 9 10/25	Event management & event spaces, proposal presentations and discussion	TBA	Completed Proposal Reaction to readings
Week 10 11/1	Communication & Media, group meetings	TBA	Update on project Reaction to readings
Week 11 11/8	Community-building, group meetings	TBA	Update on project Reaction to readings
Week 12 11/15	Presentations, tours, progress, machinema	TBA	Update on project Reaction to readings
Week 13 11/22	Eating Turkeys	TBA	Update on project Reaction to readings
Week 14 11/29	Political / Social / Health Campaigns, Group meetings	TBA	Update on project Reaction to readings
Week 15 12/6	Final presentation of projects	None	Project documentation and presentation