My Second Life

Lessons Learned from the Front Line

Tracy Rutherford, Ph.D., Holli Leggette, & Theresa Murphrey, Ph.D., Texas A&M University
David Doerfert, Ph.D. & Christy Witt, Ph.D., Texas Tech University
Leslie Edgar, Ph.D. & Don Edgar, Ph.D., University of Arkansas
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Second Life

- Established in 2001 by Linden Labs
- Adopted by education in 2008
- ~ 60,000 users log in daily
- 15,000 new user registrations monthly
- More than 200 educational institutions globally
- Cost of ownership
  - Island purchase $1,000
  - Annual maintenance $3,500
AgriCulture Island

• Established in 2010
• Adjacent to 3 Texas A&M Islands
• Three-year project funded by USDA-NIFA Higher Education Challenge Grant
• Development of crisis communication scenarios
• Evaluation of educational effectiveness

• Risk & Crisis Communications in Agriculture
• Modeled after Matagorda County, Texas
• 2010 – Hurricane
• 2011 – Food-borne illness
• 2012 – Post-hurricane veterinary triage
2010

- Beta test
- Voluntary opportunity to participate in orientation with experienced SL users
- All SL activities were supplemental
- All SL activities were ungraded
- No formal orientation activities
- Weekly reflective journals
- Team SL activity
2010

- Team board meeting with faculty role-players

- Post-disaster press conference
2011

- Required individual orientation
- Graded SL participation assignments
- Team pre-simulation activity
- Interactive “live” sessions
  - Interviews with City Representatives
  - High School Pep Rally
  - City Festival
  - Church Picnic
  - Post-crisis press conference
  - Board meeting with City Representatives
- Reflective journals
- End of course SL evaluation
2011
Performance Expectancy

• All students found Second Life easy to use
  • 66.7% Somewhat easy
  • 33.3% Very Easy
• 58.4% were “somewhat to very positive about Second Life as an educational tool

• Students reported that they had resources and knowledge to use Second Life
• Second Life enhanced effectiveness and was useful in their education
Student Perceptions

• Second Life simulation and end-of-course project had greatest influence on
  • self-confidence as future crisis communicator
  • Critical thinking skills related to course content

• New technology creates anxiety
  • Opportunities to practice with technology are important
  • Orientation needs to involve faculty and users with SL experience

• Simulation helped students understand and appreciate the fluid nature of a crisis situation more than traditional lecture/discussion methods
Faculty Perceptions

• Development of simulations requires time commitment
• Simulations must include high levels of interactivity
• Hiring of skilled designers allows faculty to focus on teaching and learning principles
• Synchronous activities engage critical thinking and team building skills
• Emotional reactions to Second Life are very real and can be overwhelming to students
Next steps