My Second Life

Lessons Learned from the Front Line

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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 "*somewha*t 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