## NEW AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

## CSU's Second Life

Academic staff at the School of Information Studies (SIS) at Charles Sturt University had a busy 2009 with significant curriculum renewal and the development of new undergraduate and postgraduate library and information management courses. As part of the development, a project team worked on the design of a purpose built CSU-SIS Learning Centre in Second Life.

For over a decade SIS lecturers have used Learning Communities MOO, commonly known as LC\_MOO. In 2008, we decided it was time to provide staff and students with a more immersive synchronous 3D learning environment, and the 3D virtual world of Second Life (owned by Linden Lab) was identified as the logical place for our school to take up residence. This 3D virtual world provides users with a greater sense of space and presence than text- and graphic-based MOO environments, because they log into Second Life (SL) as avatars – this is known as 'being in world'.



In April 2009, the project team successfully applied for a Major Educational Equipment Funds Grant from CSU's Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic). These funds were provided to cover the cost of designing and building the Learning Centre. The project team employed the consultancy services of Joanna Kay (in

Second Life: jokay, owner of virtual world jokaydia) and received supplementary funding to support the research component of the project – this included funding from CSU's Centre for Research in Complex Systems (CRiCs) and the School's Research Development Committee Research Priority Area (RPA) funding.

Upon discussions with jokay about our short- to medium-term needs and because CSU has not bought an island in SL to develop a campus presence, we decided to rent part of the north-east corner of one of jokay's islands, jokaydia III, with plans to continue this lease for the next two years. The diagram below shows the location of the CSU-SIS Learning Centre on jokaydia III (in the top right hand corner) in relation to other privately developed and public facilities in the world of jokaydia.

One aspect of the design of the CSU-SIS Learning Centre was the use of branding, using both our school and university colours and logos where appropriate. A visitor to the Learning Centre will know they are 'at CSU' when they enter this space.

Part of the design involves a number of multi-purpose spaces which use 'rezzers'. These are sets of pre-packaged learning space designs comprised of different combinations of specific environmental settings, table/seating objects, and educational/learning objects, which can be assembled and 'packed up' with the click of a button. Some of the key spaces, features, and custom-built rezzers of the Learning Centre design include:

- The CSU-SIS Landing Area where people teleport to enter the Learning Centre – to visit us, go to our SLURL: <a href="http://slurl.com/secondlife/jokaydia%20III/207/194/">http://slurl.com/secondlife/jokaydia%20III/207/194/</a>.
- The main courtyard area, with a welcome sign where visitors can click on a 'Join Us' button to become a member of the CSU-SIS group; an announcement board which receives a feed from a Google calendar listing upcoming events; a wall of recommended landmarks; a Contacts wall listing SIS Hosts and their 'in world' availability;

and different social meetings spaces including a BBQ area, courtyard garden, bench seats with views of the ocean, and a party/disco rezzer. These social, interactive spaces encourage people to interact more readily with the environment. We want staff and students to have a bit of fun as play is crucial when interacting in a 3D virtual world – and we wanted to provide our students with a social space where they could sit and chat – a dimension to distance learning that students don't commonly get access to.

- Main Meeting Hall with comfortable seating areas for social engagement, an 'Avatar corner' containing a number of educational boxes and instructional material to support people's customisation of their avatar, and two learning space rezzers.
- SIS Head Quarters (SIS HQ) with a large open space for functions, a boardroom rezzer, a bookshelf of educational tools for SIS staff, and a smaller meeting room.
- Three 'skyboxes' which are rooms located in the air space above the centre. Skybox 1 and 2 are classroom spaces, with the third skybox a dedicated research centre for academics and research teams to meet 'in world' and for our distance education PhD students to meet with their supervisory teams. The remainder of the CSU-SIS Learning Centre can be accessed at any time by the general public; these skyboxes provide privacy while conducting classes or meetings, because we only give out the landmarks to staff, students, and other collaborators. Skyboxes 1 and 2 also have garden rezzers for more private, casual social spaces.

Throughout the Learning Centre visitors will encounter promotional material about SIS courses based on our hard copy promotional material to ensure consistency in information provided. These promotional objects include 'virtual' course fliers, and interactive computer



screens with direct links to our school and university website. We have promotional material and links to Master, Graduate Certificate, and Bachelor programs and information for prospective PhD students. So, this is not just a learning space and a social space for our staff and students; it has added another dimension to our school's marketing strategy.

If you are interested in Second Life, visit <a href="http://secondlife.com">http://secondlife.com</a> .

In 2010 we look forward to residing in Second Life as we explore new ways to support teaching, research, and professional development activities. If you decide to drop by look out for one of our staff members: Lyn Hay (aka LenaLotus Latte), Joy McGregor (aka Hyacinth Genna), Jake Wallis (aka Bart Benusconi), or Bob Pymm (aka Coolhand Brentley).

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