

Exploring Pedagogical Issues in Secondlife™: Teaching Online Advertising.

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Summary:

The course was taught Winter Quarter 2007 to 33 students. Formative evaluations put overall instructor(s) effectiveness at 4.79. 17 students were interviewed one on one about their experience using personal construct theory interviews. The results were overwhelmingly positive when compared to other classroom experiences. The course was also independently assessed by members of a committee of RIT's Online Learning charged with evaluating faculty projects for the Innovations in Teaching with Technology Award 2008. The online advertising course was a finalist for this award. Dissemination on the nature of the course and its success took a number of forms, two pending book chapters, two international conferences, one RIT seminar, and two academic journal articles (one under review and one in progress). The course was also presented to the 1st RIT Imagine Festival in the Summer of 2008. It won the Alumni award for best in show and attracted over 2000 visitors. The course also resulted in a permanent fixture of an RIT island and a Saunders College of Business representation on that island.

Introduction:

We believe our Online Advertising: Special Focus Second Life course was the first of its kind. The course offered students a blended format, half of class materials were delivered in a traditional lecture / seminar format and the other half from within Second Life itself. Several features of the class are noteworthy;

1. The class made use of in-world guest speakers (9 in total) – three of which were listed by Business Week as being in the top ten richest in Second Life.
2. Students consulted for real clients both in world and for a number of clients who were thinking of exploiting Second Life for commercial gain.
3. Professors delivered one in world live lecture, question and answer session to students.
4. The students maintained blogs of their in-world experience.
5. Students also delivered a report on how they personally brand themselves online.

The average class process was as follows;

1. Students would start their regular class session with a guest lecture from an in-world celebrity. A question and answer session would follow related closely to the nature of class – namely online advertising practices.
2. Instructors would then provide a mixture of lecture and seminar whereby students would apply the knowledge to their respective clients' positions.
3. Students would be encouraged to present their findings to wider class.
4. Students would then follow up via mycourses discussions and responses to class readings identified by fellow class mates and instructors.

The class culminated in two major deliverables for clients. The first was a real time presentation either in class and or in world (where Second Life clients were able to see and hear the presentation and answer questions). The second was a report for the client that proposed an online advertising strategy.

Formative evaluation findings:

- Overall effectiveness 4.79 / 5
- Recommend to a friend 4.83 / 5
- Challenging and Rigorous 4.52 / 5
- Presented Organized Materials 4.0 / 5

Personal Construct Interviews with Students:

Personal Construct Theory is a recognized method for comparing and contrasting educational approaches. 17 students elected to be interviewed post class. Interviewees were graduate assistants to help preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of individual responses. Students were asked to identify three courses where they received 'an exceptional learning experience', three courses that were their

'worst learning experience', three additional classes that they would like to talk about, and the Online Advertising class. Triad sorts were used whereby students were asked 'how are two of these classes similar but different than the third in the context of an exceptional learning experience?' Personal constructs or features of the classroom experience were then elicited by the student respondents.

223 total constructs were provided. This averaged 13 constructs per participant and compares favorably with other studies that have used this method of enquiry. We attribute the success of the response with student interest in the subject matter. A number of class features were noted as contributing towards perceptions of the success of class;

1. Interest in the topic of class
2. Its experiential and hands on nature
3. That it was well structured
4. A demanding work load
5. Real world relevance
6. Effective use of teams
7. High personal involvement in the class
8. Effective use of cutting edge technology
9. The personal effectiveness of the instructors
10. That the instructors show interest in student learning

The interviews were also transcribed providing additional rich qualitative information about experience but for brevities sake will not be expanded upon in this report (this material will be made available in subsequent journal publications).

Awards and other forms of recognition:

This course was self nominated by the instructors for consideration of the Online Learning Innovation in Teaching with Technology Award for 2008. It was independently assessed by a panel of educational experts and was selected as one of the three outstanding examples of RIT practice for 2008. A presentation of class as part of the Imagine RIT creativity festival in the summer of 2008 won it the Alumni award for the event together with a cash award of \$1000 (which is being used to support a presentation to marketing colleagues at the Australia and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference in the Winter of 2008 – see dissemination for more information on this below). The presentation was also featured on the Imagine web site for promotional means and selected by the Saunders College of Business for the Brick City Homecoming Weekend in the Fall of 2008. News of the course was also represented at the Summer Academy of Marketing Conference in San Diego by an external conference delegate presenting pedagogical innovation for 2008. Two offers have also been made for the instructors to come and present their findings to special sessions of two marketing educators conferences.

Dissemination efforts:

Conferences:

1. Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference, Sydney 2008.
2. Association for Internet Researchers, Copenhagen 2008.
3. Department of Communication seminar series 2008.
4. New York State communication Conference 2008

Publications:

1. Invited to submit two book chapters for separate marketing texts looking at teaching in online worlds.
2. Submission to a special edition of Marketing Education Review (under review)
3. Submission to a regular edition of The Academy of Management Learning and Education (being written).

Conclusions:

The Provosts learning and innovation grant proved critical in securing the proof needed that teaching a course effectively in a virtual world like Second Life is not only possible but in some cases preferable. We would like to thank members of the committee and the fund for making this happen.