

Students Engaging Students: A Model for Remote Peer-to-Peer Learning for XR Tools and Methods

Sebastian Jakymiw¹, Meaghan Moody¹,

¹University of Rochester

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Intended to become the hub for extended reality (XR) at the University of Rochester, Studio X will foster a community of cross-disciplinary collaboration, exploration, and peer-to-peer learning that lowers barriers to entry, inspires experimentation, and drives innovative research and teaching in immersive technologies.

Due to COVID-19 distancing restrictions, construction of the space has been delayed by a year. In the interim, Zoom meeting rooms and virtual interactions have replaced our physical collaboration spaces.



Fig. 1. Rendering of Studio X created by CannonDesign, the architecture firm that designed and planned the space

I. A VIRTUAL SPACE FOR VIRTUAL REALITY?

Although XR applications might one day result in immersive learning experiences that can convincingly overcome the limitations of remote learning, the current suite of tools for XR all have challenges and shortcomings—not to mention issues concerning access to equipment and a stable internet connection for students. So how do you build a robust, equitable XR community and provide meaningful educational opportunities with the limitations imposed by the current pandemic?

In this talk, we will explore the inherent difficulties of hosting virtual workshops and programs centered on XR creation tools. We will provide an overview of the Studio X workshops and events piloted in fall 2020.

During faculty interviews, we heard repeatedly that students need a fundamental understanding of XR platforms in order to engage in upper-level XR coursework. Further, student survey results also articulated a need for opportunities to experiment and demystify XR: students want to know the possibilities and how might they become involved.



Fig. 2. Screenshot of a Unity project that includes custom assets for workshops, including a 3D-modeled campus quad

II. CONCLUSION

In response, the pilot programming provided an introduction to XR platforms, but perhaps more crucially, a glimpse into the exciting possibilities afforded by XR technologies. Student collaborators and a peer-to-peer learning model were also intrinsic to surface new ways of reaching students. Further, as XR technologies present a steep learning curve, this collaboration provided a way to both leverage and highlight the experience and expertise of our students. We will outline lessons learned from the pilot programming, discuss strategies for teaching XR methods and tools remotely, and propose ideas for connecting with students through immersive technologies.

III. REFERENCES

Pomerantz Jeffrey. *Extending XR across Campus: Year 2 of the EDUCAUSE/HP Campus of the Future Project*. Louisville, CO: EDUCAUSE, 2020.

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