A Whole New World: Libraries and Education in Second Life

Krista Godfrey, McMaster University
A Whole New World
Libraries and Education in SL
Krista Godfrey
McMaster University
March 18, 2008
Why me?

- Danu Dahlstrom “born” in sl in July 2006
- created McMaster presence in Dec. 2006
- co-chair InfoCan
The Plan

- What’s Second Life all about?
- What are libraries doing in SL?
  - McMaster in SL
- Why is education interested?
- What’s it all mean?
A Second Life for All

- Created by Linden Labs in 2003
- 3D virtual world - content created by “residents”
- over 7 million accounts created
- 2007 - open source, VOIP
- over $1.5 million US in business transactions
SL Basics

- create an avatar - virtual representation of yourself
- free or fee accounts - fees allow you to own land
- create objects, explore, socialize
Virtual Worlds

“computer-simulated environment intended for its users to inhabit and interact via avatars. This habitation is usually represented in the form of two or three-dimensional graphical representations of humanoids (or other graphical or text-based avatars). Some, but not all, virtual worlds allow for multiple users”
-Wikipedia
Virtual Worlds

- Besty Book’s 6 aspects of virtual worlds:
  - shared space
  - graphical user interface
  - immediacy
  - interactivity
  - persistance
  - socialization/community

- SL is a hybrid virtual world (gaming and social)
Libraries in SL

- Alliance Library System led the way

- small plot of land April 2006

- 1st island May 2006 (Info Island)

- now over 40 associated islands (Info Archipelago)

- Over 500 international librarians volunteering
Who’s in SL: Libraries

- Academic Libraries
- Public Libraries
- Special Libraries
- Business
- Government
Library Services in SL

- Reference
- Links to Resources
- Guest Speakers/Lectures
- Book Talks/Discussions
- Exhibits
- Training
Why Offer Services?

- Empty world syndrome
- Important to have something new to draw people
- Important to explore what services are possible in virtual worlds
- Identify differences/problems between real world and virtual world services
Reference in SL

- Main reference service on Info Island International
  - over 6500 questions last year
    - over 186 real questions
    - nearly 2300 second life questions
  - over 80 hours of service (2 hour shifts)
- Communication
  - chat, im
McMaster Reference Pilot

- Space on Cybrary City Dec 2006
- Started May 2007
- 6 hours of service, increased to 8 in Sept.
- 6 volunteers; now 12
- over 100 questions
Cybrary City Space

- Link to existing online library resources
  - catalogue
  - databases
  - digital collections
- Links to free resources
- Links to SL resources
Steel City Island

- Need room to grow
- Reference Service?
- Space for campus and community partners:
  - Multimedia class
  - Classroom audiovisual
  - Centre for Student Development
- Information literacy/teaching
- 3D exhibits/simulations
Who’s in SL: Education

- Over 150 colleges/universities in SL
  - Harvard
  - Columbia
  - Duke
  - McGill
  - Mount Saint Vincent
  - McMaster
So What’s the Big Deal?

- Second Life offers opportunities to create ideal learning settings
- Addresses many of the learning needs of the Millennial students
- Provides immersive, collaborative, creative learning experience
Education in Second Life

- Addresses many different learning styles
  - Visual
  - Kinesthetic
  - Constructivist/Exploratory
Student Advantages

- Students comfortable with computers and gaming
- Learn through exploration, collaboration, creation, and construct innovative solutions
- Anonymity takes away fear of failing, try until they get it right
- Increased motivation, become invested
- Learning becomes fun
What’s in it for the profs?

- Create the ideal learning space - not limited by space or funding
- Outcomes immediate and visible
- Activity and impact can be recorded
- Students invested and involved
- Persistent space
Advantages

- Encourages student-faculty interaction
- Encourages cooperation among students
- Encourages active learning
- Provides prompt feedback
- Respects diverse talents and ways of knowing
What can be done?

- Limited by imagination (and some skill)
- Applies to numerous fields
  - Economics
  - Engineering
  - Anthropology
  - Biology
  - English
An Ideal Learning Environment?

- Customized to specific student needs
- Immediate feedback
- Constructive
- Motivates beyond externally imposed requirements
- Builds enduring
Rose Coloured Glasses?

- High technical requirements
- Stability
- Griefers
- Ethical issues
- High Learning Curve
Why SL?
Libraries

- Point-of-need service
- Learning opportunities
- Proactive rather than reactive
- Help direct future services
- Amazing networking and collaboration opportunities
Why SL: Education

- Create your learning environment
- Meet learning needs of students
Final Thought

- Gartner Group predicts 80% of Internet users will have an avatar by 2011
- Something will replace SL
- Important to be prepared for what’s next
- We can help direct the future