

CMSI / PSYC 398-01

INTRODUCTION TO VIRTUAL WORLDS

<http://myweb.lmu.edu/dondi/fall2010/cmsi398>

Fall 2010

University Hall 3240
R 4:30–7:00pm
3 semester hours

Richard L. Gilbert, PhD

rgilbert@lmu.edu, SL: Griffith Parx

Office Hours: R 3–4pm, or by appt.

University Hall 4767; (310) 338-7635

John David N. Dionisio, PhD

dondi@lmu.edu, SL: Day Donner

TR 9am–12nn, or by appt.

Doolan 106; (310) 338-5782

Objectives and Outcomes

This course is built upon L. Dee Fink's *taxonomy of significant learning*, as applied to virtual worlds. Long after the course concludes, our hope is that:

- You understand the concept of a virtual world and are proficient at moving, communicating, and otherwise functioning in this environment
- You understand the basic properties of virtual objects, and can construct and customize such objects of moderate complexity
- You know the range of behaviors that virtual objects can manifest as *agents*, and can script such behaviors into these objects
- You feel confident about your ability to explore a virtual world and its capabilities on your own, ranging from being a *consumer* of the virtual world (experiencing things, interacting with other avatars) to a *producer* within that world (creating and scripting objects, providing services)
- You recognize and appreciate how the psychological and technological issues in this course relate to society, our daily lives, and ourselves
- You have some skills and tools for “leaving your comfort zone” and learning more about psychology and computer science on your own
- You learn how to communicate and work effectively with colleagues from different disciplines

Materials and Texts

- Assorted handouts, articles, and sample code to be distributed throughout the semester
- *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson (any available edition or publisher)
- Accounts in Second Life and Google

Additional information is also available on the web; do not hesitate to look for further sources of information regarding the concepts, techniques, tools, and paradigms that we will discuss.

Classroom, Laboratory, and Virtual Environment

We are all responsible for maintaining a classroom and laboratory environment that is safe and conducive to learning. This course is unique in that it also includes a *virtual* environment within which these responsibilities are also applicable. As such, we will observe the following:

1. You are responsible for your own learning and for being a good class citizen.
2. We will always treat individuals with respect, and act with honesty and integrity at all times.
3. We will treat all classroom and laboratory facilities, virtual or otherwise, with appropriate care.
4. Class will start on time.
5. You are expected to come to class having done the assigned reading and preparatory work.
6. You are expected to bring the required materials to each class session.
7. Cell phones, pagers, and other communication or music devices will be turned off.

Course Work and Grading

Graded coursework consists of in-class exercises, 2 tests, 1 course blog/portfolio, and 1 project. Letter grades are determined as follows: $\geq 90\%$ gets an A– or better; $\geq 80\%$ gets a B– or better; $\geq 70\%$ gets a C– or better. The instructors may curve grades upward based on qualitative considerations such as degree of difficulty, effort, class participation, time constraints, and overall attitude. Grades are never curved downward.

In-Class Exercises

In-class exercises will be assigned throughout the semester, about once per week. In-class exercises are where you can learn from your mistakes without grading penalty: if you do the work and submit it on time, you will get full credit, regardless of

correctness. What goes around comes around: the effort you put into the exercises pays off in the midterm, blog/portfolio, and database/3D exhibit. The exercise submission deadline is always the end of that class's day. Submissions after the deadline receive half credit, period.

Tests

Exams are scheduled for October 7 and December 16. They are meant to assess foundational knowledge, and as such, questions may be content-oriented or forward-looking (i.e., "use this knowledge to resolve this situation"). You may neither solicit nor give help while an exam is in progress. Late and/or missed tests are handled on a case-to-case basis; in all instances, talk to us about them.

Course Blog/Portfolio

In-class work will be supplemented by assorted readings, reflections, and activities to be done in between sessions. These will be documented in <http://lmu-virtual-fall-2010.blogspot.com>. Blog entries will be graded based on their punctuality during the semester, then as an overall *portfolio* of work at the end of the semester.

Database and 3D Exhibit of Psychologically Beneficial Virtual World Applications

You will apply what you learn to create a database and 3D exhibit of psychologically beneficial virtual world applications, working in interdisciplinary teams to: (a) search virtual environments for such applications, (b) gather and present data about them, and (c) create a virtual exhibit about these applications with pertinent information, links, and illustrations. The exhibits will be graded based on their psychology content as well as their technical design and functionality. The group nature of this work will also involve self- and peer assessment. To facilitate the creation of these exhibits, groups may need to pay for uploads or other virtual services; the instructors view this cost as commensurate with or less than a typical textbook purchase. The project is due on December 9.

Attendance

Attendance at all class sessions (virtually or otherwise, as appropriate) is expected, but not absolutely required. Each week will include activities and presentations that will be difficult to make up. If you must miss one or more class sessions, it is your

responsibility to keep up. The instructors should be notified as soon as possible, electronically or by phone, of the reasons for all absences. We will make arrangements to discuss make-up work. At the discretion of the instructors, excessive absences may result in a grade of incomplete (I).

Note that the last day to add or drop a class without a grade of W is September 3. The withdrawal or credit/no-credit status deadline is November 5.

University Policy on Academic Honesty

Loyola Marymount University expects high standards of honesty and integrity from all members of its community. All students are expected to follow the LMU honor code, as stated in the *LMU Undergraduate Bulletin 2010-2011*.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Students with special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act who need reasonable modifications, special assistance, or accommodations in this course should promptly direct their request to the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office. Any student who currently has a documented disability (physical, learning, or psychological) needing academic accommodations should contact DSS (Daum Hall, Room 224, x84535) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit <http://www.lmu.edu/dss> for additional information.

Course Schedule

Specifics may change as the course progresses; university dates (*italicized*) are less likely to change.

September	Course overview, history of virtual worlds, basic skills
<i>September 3</i>	<i>Last day to add or drop a class without a grade of W</i>
October	Building and scripting
October 7	Exam 1
November / December	Virtual world psychology and culture: benefits and applications
<i>November 5</i>	<i>Withdrawal/credit/no-credit deadline</i>
<i>November 24–26</i>	<i>Thanksgiving; no class</i>
December 9	Database and 3D exhibit due
December 16	Exam 2 (non-cumulative)