

CMSI / PSYC 398-01

INTRODUCTION TO VIRTUAL WORLDS

<http://myweb.lmu.edu/dondi/spring2009/cmsi398>

Spring 2009

University Hall 3240

T 4:30–7:00pm

3 semester hours

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Office Hours: T 3–4pm, W 2–4pm, or by appt. TR 9–10:30am, R 3–6pm, or by appt.

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Course Objectives

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 effectively communicate and work with colleagues from different disciplines

Materials and Texts

- Assorted handouts, articles, and sample code to be distributed throughout the semester
- *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card and *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson (various publishers)
- Accounts in Second Life and Google/Gmail

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 promptly 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 (25%), 1 midterm (25%), 1 course blog/portfolio (25%), and 1 virtual exhibit (25%). 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 throughout the course. Grades are never curved downward.

In-Class Exercises

In-class exercises will be assigned throughout the semester, generally 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 virtual exhibit. The exercise submission deadline is always the end of that class's day. Submissions after the deadline receive half credit, period.

Midterm

The midterm is scheduled for February 24. It is meant to assess the foundational knowledge presented in the course; questions include content-oriented elements as well as forward-looking, applicative portions (i.e., "use this knowledge to resolve this situation"). You may neither solicit nor give help while the 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 submitted to <http://lmu-virtual-spring-2009.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.

Virtual Exhibit

In the virtual exhibit, you will apply what you have learned earlier in the course to create a virtual exhibit for permanent display at the Dreamworld Museum on LMU Psychology Island. Students will work in interdisciplinary teams to create an interactive, virtual exhibit on some aspect of the psychology of dreams. 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, each group will be given a budget of around L\$9000 to spend as needed. The exhibits will be formally "opened" (and are thus due) on May 5.

Attendance

Attendance at all sessions is not absolutely required, but if you must miss class, it is your responsibility to keep up with the course work. Note that the add/drop/withdraw-with-100%-refund deadline is January 17. The withdrawal or credit/no-credit status deadline is March 20.

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 2008-2010*, pp. 58–59 (online at <http://www.lmu.edu/Page13245.aspx>).

Students with Disabilities

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with the Disability Support Service (DSS) Office within the Learning Resource Center (Daum Hall, Room 224). Please schedule an appointment with us early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course for which you have been approved.

Course Schedule

This schedule may change based on the actual ebb and flow of the class; deadlines, exams, university, and national dates (*italicized*) are less likely to change than course topics.

January	Course overview, history of virtual worlds, introduction to Second Life
<i>January 17</i>	<i>Last day to add or drop a class without a grade of W; last day to withdraw from the semester for a 100% refund</i>
February/ March	Computer science concepts underlying virtual worlds
February 24	Midterm
<i>March 9–13</i>	<i>Spring break; no class</i>
<i>March 20</i>	<i>Withdraw/credit/no-credit deadline</i>
<i>March 31</i>	<i>Cesar Chavez Day; no class</i>
April/May	Virtual worlds synthesis; psychology practicum
<i>May 5</i>	<i>Presentation of virtual exhibits</i>

You can view the class calendar on the Web at <http://ical.mac.com/dondi/LMU>. If you have an iCalendar-savvy client (i.e., Mozilla Calendar, Ximian Evolution, KOrganizer, Apple iCal, etc.), you can subscribe to the class calendar at webcal://ical.mac.com/dondi/LMU.ics. On-the-fly updates and adjustments to the class schedule will be reflected in this calendar.