

# Chapter 11

## Trip to the Virtual Career World

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### ABSTRACT

*A Faculty Innovator Grant allowed the Old Dominion University Career Management Center to develop the capability and protocol to take a group of students to an employer site in Second Life (SL) within the context of a one-credit-hour career course. This chapter will discuss the development process and the challenges encountered in preparing a class to visit and productively interact with employers in SL. It will also discuss minimizing development costs and the amount of faculty time and effort necessary to incorporate trips to virtual worlds in their class syllabi. This is an example of “how to” for those interested in taking groups into SL rather than an academic study of the effects of a visit in SL on the students. Therefore citing of research and discussion of educational outcomes is kept to a minimum.*

### INTRODUCTION

The ability to facilitate mediated experiences via virtual field trips can help reduce barriers and provide situated, cooperative, and experiential learning in a constructive and relevant environment. Established virtual worlds create opportunities for students to gather and interact with a focus on visiting large, otherwise hard-to-approach companies. These organizations are already conducting recruiting, training, and

development virtually. This project was developed to help prepare students for the way organizations are doing business by providing insight, both in etiquette and literacy, into appropriate professional networking that is transferrable to both the virtual and real world.

Old Dominion University’s Career Management Center (CMC) is a two-time national award winner for innovative career services delivered: live face to face, live via distance synchronously, and on demand via distance asynchronously. CMC provides electronic services to clients world wide 24/7/365. The focal point of this capability is

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the Cyber Career Center<sup>1</sup> staffed by a full-time supervisor and two graduate assistants as Cyber Career Coaches. Old Dominion University is a state university comprised of 24,000 students and each of the university's six colleges has a CMC faculty administrator assigned as the Career Liaison with full service satellite offices operating in Art & Letters, Business, Engineering, and Sciences.

Building upon this expertise, the university awarded a Faculty Innovator Grant allowing the CMC to develop a protocol to take a group of students in the context of a career course to an employer site in Second Life (SL). Students interacted with employer representatives and guided activities in the simulation and returned in the space of a class period. Students documented and reflected on this experience in their final portfolio presentation for the class.

CMC established a private island in SL with facilities, spaces, and vehicles for training staff and students to use avatars and to serve as a tour group gathering and departure point. CMC has developed a trained staff of Cyber Coaches and has created a training protocol to prepare those unfamiliar with SL and avatar usage to be able to function as part of a tour group. As a result, students in both of the CMC taught 200 and 400-level career courses successfully created their avatars and learned to navigate and communicate in SL in preparation for virtual field trips to employer sites.

Note: Table 1 outlines our sections and locations. Two sections from two different level career courses, UNIV 200 and UNIV 400 were successfully taken to IBM during the fall of 2009. Three sections, two from UNIV 200 and one from UNIV 400, were taken to Lockheed Martin in the spring of 2010. Courses included diverse majors and a

variety of age groups including non-traditional aged students.

Evaluations were made by surveying the students after each phase of the experience and corrections made to the syllabus and protocol based on that feedback. These revisions have led to expanding the SL capability to include other classes that have a career component in their syllabi. Based on the success and growth potential of this project, this chapter will discuss the development process and the difficulties encountered in preparing a class to visit and productively interact with employers in SL for career development and academic purposes. It will also discuss minimizing development costs and minimizing the amount of faculty time and learning curve to utilize virtual worlds, in order to incorporate this capability in their class syllabi.

Major employers now have elaborate corporate sites developed in SL to support their marketing and personnel recruitment activities and enhance internal collaboration capabilities for their staff. The project discussed in this chapter develops the protocol to prepare a class to take advantage of these employer-based simulations, to gain new experiences, and to interact with people whom they would not normally have access.

## BACKGROUND

The value of SL is the ability to "travel" to unique destinations and to move about within the environment, have an exchange of information with others, and interact with resources by sight, text, and audio. The primary goal of this project was to use the technology provided by a virtual world to take students where they could not normally go and gain experiences that would otherwise elude them, addressing the student - employer interaction issue and ensuring a "bridge" between the experience in the virtual world and the actual professional practices students might encounter in the real world. The intent of this project was

*Table 1. Course Sections and Locations*

Semester	Class Level/Title	Company
Fall	UNIV 200 and UNIV 400	IBM
Spring	UNIV 200 and UNIV 400	Lockheed

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