

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN ONLINE EDUCATION:
SECOND LIFE AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

by

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(Under the Direction of Libby Morris)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the collegiate community that online students experience and the possibilities associated with augmenting student learning by using Second Life in the online classroom. Specifically, I examined how Second Life could be used as a teaching tool to break down the barriers found in distance education, such as students feeling disconnected from their peers and instructors and having lower levels of engagement in online courses, leading to lower retention rates.

To explore how students could build a community in their online courses, I incorporated Second Life into an online cultural diversity course offered at a community college in Georgia. Within this course, I required students to participate in social mixers in Second Life, explore the Second Life world using a scavenger hunt and other activities, and keep a journal to reflect on their Second Life experiences. This case study used observation of students, interviews, and document analysis to interpret and understand their perceptions about the usefulness of Second Life as a teaching tool as it relates to building a collegiate community in their online classes. I interviewed participants using a semi-structured interview format, transcribed the digital files of the interviews, and completed member checks with students to check my perceptions of the

information gathered during interviews. I also analyzed the journals students kept during the course of the semester. Students indicated that Second Life is a useful tool for creating community, but they did not have the time to devote to it because of their other priorities. Additionally, however, students did not have access to the technology available to allow Second Life to work properly, causing more problems than it is worth for the time being.

INDEX WORDS: Distance education, Community, Engagement, Virtual Worlds, Second Life

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DEDICATION

For Bill, who was my best friend, my biggest supporter, and my inspiration. I made a promise to you that I would complete my degree. I hope I have made you proud.

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I cannot begin to express the heartfelt gratitude I have for all of the people who have helped me get to this point. My family, friends, doctoral cohort members, professors, employer, and colleagues provided the encouragement and support I needed through some very rocky times. My family and close friends are all too aware of the challenges I faced to get to this point. They knew that even though I never ask for help I needed it anyway. They stepped in when I couldn't go any further. My parents and in-laws spent a lot of time traveling between Michigan and Georgia to help me take care of my ill husband so I could travel to Athens to attend classes. They sacrificed their time so that I could further my education and I am so grateful. My parents and sister have kindly put up with my rants and raves and phone calls including "maniacal" laughter, as my dad put it, when I felt like all I could do was laugh. I'm sure I gave them countless hours of both worry and amusement.

I am grateful for some amazing friends who have provided support throughout my doctoral studies and, subsequently, through a difficult period in my life. My best friend, Heather, knows just when to call or email to brighten my day and helps me laugh by bringing up all our inside jokes when I need them most. Jennifer has been a wonderful distraction, proving to be my partner in crime when I need a "mental health escape" from the stress. Our beach trips have likely kept me sane. Elizabeth always understands just what I'm going through and has provided wonderful motivation. Her unwillingness to accept the word "no" has been beneficial in that it forced me to accept help along the way. Shani has been my sounding board. She is the best

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however, because not only did he become my dissertation advisor, but the advisor to the other four cohort members majoring in Higher Education. He provided us with a hellish introduction to graduate school, but proved to be someone who many of us learned the most from. His good nature made him easy to relate to and I appreciate how approachable he has been. Dr. Toma has been an advocate for me with my other professors, helping them to understand my personal circumstances, and has encouraged me to pursue my education when I thought the road was too rocky. He, like my cohort members, led me to this point today. I cannot express enough gratitude. I additionally appreciate Dr. Libby Morris for stepping in as my major advisor when Dr. Toma could no longer serve. I'm also thankful to Dr. Karen Webber and Dr. Janette Hill for their support during the hard work of my dissertation. I enjoyed their enthusiasm for this new world I asked them to explore with me. Their wisdom was highly valued.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Technological advances have produced a period of rapid change and educational systems have had to adapt. Educational technologies, those used in distance education courses, will have a profound impact on curriculum and on teaching and learning methodologies (Polka, 1999). In the years since Polka wrote about the impact of educational technologies on teaching and learning, distance education has rapidly grown in the United States and abroad and continues to expand. Polka's work highlights the importance of adapting to the changing educational landscape, especially given the rapid growth. The boom in distance education can be attributed to the Internet being made available to civilian organizations in the mid-1980s by the U.S. government (Jones, 1998; Saba, 2005), as well as the pervasiveness of broadband. Most institutions of higher education in the United States now offer some form of distance learning courses. As a comparison, a study completed by the U.S. Department of Education estimated that 753,640 students were enrolled in distance education during 1994-95 and an estimated 3,077,000 students were enrolled during the 2000-01 academic year (Saba, 2005), but an estimated 12.2 million students were enrolled in college-level distance education courses in the 2006-07 academic year, a growth of 1,618% in about ten years (Parsad & Lewis, 2008).

While the number of students enrolled in distance education courses is not a measurement of the effectiveness of these courses, Kluge and Riley (2008) argue that technological change and innovation have altered both what is taught and how educators teach. For colleges to survive, they have to rethink where, what, when and how students learn.

Additionally, Chickering and Kytle (1999) argue that because student characteristics are also changing (in that only one in ten students fit the traditional pattern of attending full time, being 18-22 years of age, and living on campus), students want a different type of relationship with their colleges and colleges must adapt.

Many researchers have examined distance education, specifically courses taught online, in terms of best delivery methods to achieve student learning, as well as many other related topics (Good, Howland, & Thackray, 2008; Kluge & Riley, 2008; Leese, 2009; McBrien, Jones, & Cheng, 2009). The primary problem critics bring up is that the new technologies used in distance learning are not interactive and do not have collaborative experiences similar to traditional, on-campus classes (Maor, 2003). Researchers have thus explored how to build a community within online courses to address these concerns, with virtual communities becoming the topic of interest. Though Henri and Pudelko (2003) discuss authors who question whether or not communities can exist in a virtual mode because the concept of community cannot be dissociated from a common physical space, they argue that virtual communities exist and play a socialization role to the same extent that “real” communities do. Among these are social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Second Life. Second Life is unique in this grouping because of its classification as a virtual world, or a three-dimensional environment, which includes aspects of the real world represented in virtual spaces (Metaverse Roadmap, 2007). People are represented by avatars, or a representative of a real-life person in “cartoon” form, and are able to communicate in the Second Life world via chat, instant messaging, and voice-over IP. These social networking sites provide a new arena of educational opportunity, though research remains segmented.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the collegiate community that online students experience and the possibilities associated with augmenting student learning by using Second Life in the online classroom. For the purpose of this study, I define collegiate community as a group of people who share common educational goals or practices, are interdependent, feel a sense of belonging, and where learning takes place as a social process in a college setting. This definition does not specify that a community must be within a common physical space. While this definition is not a widely held definition for collegiate community, it is compiled from several authors' definitions or discussions about community (Halaby, 2000; Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993).

Further, I examine how online students are engaged with their classes, their instructors, their peers, and their college, following research suggesting that educators must employ technology as a lever to promote student engagement and maximize the power of technology as a method for student success in college (Ehrmann, 2004). I want to know how online courses can be improved to meet the needs of the students, recognizing that online learning and the use of technology may put certain student populations at a disadvantage because of socioeconomic status, lack of resources, and problems for students of certain learning styles (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010).

To explore how online students engage with their college and build community within their classes, I used Second Life in an online class, asking students to participate in social mixers to increase interaction between students and between the students and me as the instructor. I then examined how online students view social networking and virtual worlds in their online educational experiences in terms of increasing student engagement and building a collegiate

community. The college where I teach, Darton College, has been using Facebook, another social networking site, to inform students about upcoming events on campus, though it has not been used to reach out to online students specifically. Second Life may be a useful social networking site to build the collegiate community of Darton College considering that registered users are growing. As of December, 2008, Facebook had 42 million users in the United States, with the number of users growing by 51.3% between July and December 2008 (Burcher, 2008). Second Life is also gaining in popularity, though with just over fifteen million registered users (WebProNews, 2009), it has a long way to go to catch up to Facebook in terms of popularity. Darton College, however, recently rented property within Second Life because of its rapid growth since opening in 2003. A recent edition of the *Darton College Update* reports that “Instructional Technology and Distance Learning (ITDL) and the Division of Online Learning are working to create Second Life opportunities for learning, student services, and recruitment” (“Darton seeks to improve presence in Second Life,” 2008). Faculty members at the college have not used the Second Life property to date, however, so this virtual world as it impacts our student demographics has yet to be explored.

The purpose of my dissertation, therefore, is addressed by the following research questions:

1. How can Second Life augment online students’ learning experiences in terms of building collegiate community?
2. How does Second Life work in practice among online students?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it offers practical contributions to the emerging field of online education. Educators in online instruction have struggled with how to teach in this

environment, recognizing that they need to rethink where, what, when and how students learn in an online course. The traditional view of education where the instructor acts as a “sage on the stage” does not work in online education, where students must take on a much more active and independent role. Faculty members must act more as facilitators in online courses, where they encourage students to work collaboratively and form learning communities. This study will help connect the research showing positive outcomes from community building, found in student engagement literature, to the online realm.

More specifically, this study explores how the virtual world of Second Life can be useful in terms of building a collegiate community in online courses. These virtual worlds “offer an opportunity for people to interact in a way that conveys a sense of presence lacking in other media” (New Media Consortium, 2007, p. 18) because they “may facilitate collaboration by providing a means of communication that is more like face-to-face communication than other popular technologies such as email, blogs, and wikis” (Kluge & Riley, 2008, p. 131). Students in this study communicated in Second Life and reflected on their experiences using this medium to complete course requirements. In their interviews at the end of the course, they discussed their perceptions about the impact of using Second Life and how connected they felt to their peers and to me. This information demonstrated the influence Second Life had on their learning experiences and gave insights in terms of practical tips for faculty members using Second Life in their online courses.

This study, therefore, may address a void in the literature as another aspect that online educators and institutions offering online courses must consider. Results from this study may help institutions that offer online classes improve services offered to their online students. More specifically, I examined how Darton College attempts to reach its online students, so the results

of this research should help the college improve their services and increase student engagement and retention.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Discussions about engagement in the classroom are not new. Educators and learners have already discovered the benefits of an engaged learning approach to education, as evidenced by the frequency of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), though the power of engagement in online courses has not been fully realized. Many researchers have examined online courses in terms of best delivery methods to achieve student learning, as well as many other related topics (Good, Howland, & Thackray, 2008; Kluge & Riley, 2008; Leese, 2009; McBrien, Jones, & Cheng, 2009). The primary problem critics cite is that the new technologies used in online education are not interactive and collaborative experiences similar to traditional, on-campus classes (Maor, 2003). As Chamberlain and Vrasidas (2001) point out:

learning is interactive when learners are actively engaged in a variety of activities, and along with their peers and teacher, they are co-constructors of knowledge. The learning environment provides a sense of a learning community within which participants collaborate with others to negotiate and share meanings. (p. 79)

Based on my definition of collegiate community, and from the statement above, it seems that learners need a social aspect in their learning to be engaged. Hill, Raven, and Han (2002) support this idea, speculating that students in online classes may feel isolated, leading to high dropout rates and dissatisfaction with online courses. This may relate to a lack of perception of community in courses that are not face-to-face. They say, “learners may feel like they are isolated, creating an experience of lack of presence from others involved in the course” (p. 384).

Researchers have thus explored how to build a community within online courses to address these concerns, with virtual communities becoming the topic of interest. Hill, Raven, and Han (2002) recognize the benefits, pointing out that “discovering the best strategies and techniques for community building may lead to enhanced course outcomes (e.g., retention, satisfaction, learning outcomes) by participants in WBLEs [web-based learning environments]” (p. 384). Palloff and Pratt (2007) discuss how community building can occur in the online environment, by creating an online presence. They recognize the challenges of the online classroom, where instructors and students are predominantly represented by text on a screen and where everyone involved cannot see the facial expressions and body language that help them gauge responses to what is being discussed. Palloff and Pratt, therefore, recommend that students gather online, just as they do on the campus of a university, to build a social connection. To gather online, students and faculty can consider social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Second Life.

To address the purpose of my research and research questions relating to building collegiate community using Second Life in the online classroom, I will begin this chapter by exploring literature about student engagement, demonstrating the importance of engagement to student success and discussing how there are limits to engagement in online education. I will explore the concept of community in education, including online or virtual communities such as Second Life, and how these communities impact students. To conclude this chapter, I will discuss how Second Life, and the community it is considered to be a part of, is a response to the lack of engagement in online education.

Student Engagement

Despite attempts to define student engagement, there has not been a general consensus on how to define it. Bowen (2005) observed that despite vision statements, strategic plans, learning outcomes, and the agendas of national reform movements to work to create engaged learning and learners “an explicit consensus about what we actually mean by engagement or why it is important is lacking” (p. 3). Of course, even without a consensus, researchers have offered their own definitions. Harper and Quaye (2009) state that student engagement is “simply characterized as participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes” (pp. 2-3). Barkley (2010), recognizing that most definitions of student engagement discuss what the college as a whole can do, proposes a definition of student engagement in the context of the college classroom: “Student engagement is a process and a product that is experienced on a continuum and results from the synergistic interaction between motivation and active learning” (p. 8).

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie and Gonyea (2008) note that student engagement represents “both time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices” (p. 542). Their research indicates, “Student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by persistence between the first and second year of college” (p. 555). Some examples of educationally purposeful activities, according to their research, included: worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments, participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course, used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment,

talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor, and discussed ideas from their readings or classes with others outside of class.

An early pairing of the term engagement with learning occurred in Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) work on the impact of college on students. They said, "Perhaps the strongest conclusion that can be made is the least surprising. Simply put, the greater the student's involvement or engagement in academic work or in the academic experience of college, the greater his or her level of knowledge acquisition and general cognitive development" (p. 616). Astin (1984) extended this idea, claiming that students learn more when they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. True involvement, according to Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984), requires students to invest energy in academics, relationships, and activities related to the campus. In terms of how institutional and pedagogical practices can achieve maximum student involvement and learning, Astin advises that instructors cannot focus solely on technique but must also be aware of the characteristics of motivated students and how much time and energy they are devoting to the learning process (p. 305). The ownership is not fully on faculty, however. Pace (1982) discusses that the most influential variable for student achievement is the quality of effort students themselves invest in using the facilities and opportunities for learning and development that exist in the college setting (p. 19).

As Harper and Quaye (2009) note, those who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities are more likely than their disengaged peers to persist through graduation. They highlight how this assertion has been empirically proven and documented by numerous higher education researchers (e.g., Astin, 1975, 1993; Bean, 1990, 2005; Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Bridges, Cambridge, Kuh, & Leegwater, 2005; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Peltier, Laden, & Matranga, 1999; Stage & Hossler,

2000; Tinto, 1993, 2000, 2005; p. 4). In fact, engagement is the single most significant predictor of persistence (Tinto, 2000), with many students discontinuing their education because they feel disconnected from their peers, professors and the college administration.

In 1987 Chickering and Gamson published *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. The seven principles outlined were (1) encourages contact between students and faculty, (2) develops reciprocity and cooperation among students, (3) encourages active learning, (4) gives prompt feedback, (5) emphasizes time on task, (6) communicates high expectations, and (7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was developed to measure dimensions of engagement, or the extent to which students participate in the proven educational processes that contribute to the outcomes (p. 2), and is based on the work of many researchers, including Chickering and Gamson's seven principles outlined above. The NSSE was built on five benchmarks: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interaction with faculty members, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment (Carnegie Foundation, 2000). This survey, conducted every year to measure student engagement, was created for on campus education, but the principles have been widely applied to online learning. Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) later applied the seven principles to online education after realizing that new communication and information technologies had impacted higher education.

Robinson and Hullinger (2008) tested benchmarks within NSSE, and by extension the educationally purposeful activities identified above, by surveying students about their experiences in online learning environments. They concluded that the

online learning environment is an ideal setting to promote greater involvement in mental capacities [and] the online curriculum should actively engage students through

challenging academic rigor, consistent and timely student-faculty interaction, a collaborative learning environment, and activities that enrich the development of the student. (p. 107)

It is important to note that new media offers many opportunities for interaction, yet many instructors rely on non-interactive modes of delivery that focus on creating an online lecture. This, however, is akin to providing a digital correspondence course with potential problems of learner isolation and high dropout rates (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). The purpose of distance education used to be that of digital correspondence, but has changed as researchers have realized the need for building learner-centered approaches in the online classroom and adapting to the flexible nature of the technology that is required (Pallof & Pratt, 2007).

Shin and Chan (2004) examined student engagement in online learning as related to perceptions of institutional presence and how institutional presence is related to learning outcomes, student satisfaction with their distance learning experience at the institution, and students intent-to-persist with distance learning. They found that levels of student engagement were unrelated to students' perceptions of learning outcomes, but that the more frequently students engage with the online class platform, the "stronger the student senses the availability of the institutional support while feeling connectedness with the institution" (p. 285). They continued their findings by indicating that

Distance students who have a stronger sense of availability of, and connectedness with, educational programme providers are likely to be more positive about learning outcomes, more satisfied with their learning experiences and more willing to continue being involved in distance learning than are students with a weaker sense of institutional presence. (p. 286)

“Engaged learning stimulates learners to actively participate in the learning situation, and thus gain the most knowledge from being a member of an online learning community” (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004, p. 7). They note that the involvement of the learner in the course, whether one calls it interaction, engagement, or building community, is critical to student success.

As Kluge and Riley (2008) point out, however, “Technological change and innovation have greatly altered both what is taught and how educators teach. In order to survive, colleges will have to rethink *where, what, when* and *how* students learn” (p. 127). Under this new model, students take on a more active and independent role and are encouraged to work collaboratively, forming learning communities where each participant is both a teacher and a learner (Kluge & Riley, 2008). While the student must take initiative to engage in these new academic activities, it

is the faculty member’s role to create purposeful course design that promotes interaction, participation, and communication in the online learning environment...educators and instructors have to consciously and consistently sustain and grow the types and level of engagement in online education. (Robinson & Hullinger, 2008, p. 107)

Morris, Xu, and Finnegan (2005) note, however, that while a faculty member’s role may be to bring about higher student engagement, it isn’t necessary for faculty members to carry the discussion. They found that whether online instructors participated in the class as an online monitor (<75 instructor postings), as an online facilitator (125-275 instructor postings), or as an online teacher/participant (>450 postings), with varying roles (pedagogical, social and managerial) involved in within the online classroom, having a balance in the type of faculty participation supports student engagement, while also decreasing faculty workload in the discussion area (p. 76).

Community in Higher Education

To begin the discussion about community, I provide two definitions of community. Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) define community as a dynamic whole that emerges when a group of people share common practices, are interdependent, make joint decisions, identify with something larger than themselves, and make a long-term commitment to well-being. Lave and Wenger (1991) state that community does not

imply necessarily co-presence, a well-defined identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (p. 98)

Building a community within a college has been researched from many points of view. Communities can be residential, or geographic, or has been referred to as communities of people living in close proximity. Another viewpoint about communities are the “communities of interest”, where members of an organization have shared interests (Wang, Sierra, & Folger, 2003). Researchers have specified communities in educational contexts in terms of learning communities, where courses are linked to one another to give students a greater depth of knowledge in those courses along with higher levels of student engagement. Based on these definitions and ideas about community, and the works of Halaby (2000) and Henri and Pudelko (2003), I developed a definition of collegiate community for use in this study. It is a group of people who share common educational goals or practices, are interdependent, feel a sense of belonging, and where learning takes place as a social process in a college setting. This definition does not specify that a community must be within a common physical space, however. It may be important to note that an online collegiate community is likely a subset of the general collegiate

community. To go into further detail about this distinction, this section will explore two different types of communities: on-campus communities, including learning communities, and online communities, including virtual communities and social networking sites.

On-Campus Community.

Community can be referred to in terms of a physical space, a feeling of connection, and a group of people, among other distinctions. Palmer (1997) opined that, “Like teaching itself, creating educational community can never be reduced to technique. It emerges from a principle that can express itself in endless varieties, depending on the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 4), supporting the idea that community is defined in multiple ways. Wahlstedt, Pekkola, and Niemela (2008) argue that the learning environment, or community, is distinguished as both a space and a place. They say, “Traditional learning spaces (e.g., the classroom) provide tools and structures for learning periods (e.g., books and teaching), but they also enable the learner to become receptive and mentally ‘tune his/her brain’ for learning” (p. 1021). Rovai (2001) stated that community depends on the setting but theorized the four components of “classroom community” as spirit (feeling of group identity), trust (feeling of safety and support), interaction (task-related and socio-emotional), and learning (the construction of shared knowledge). Henri and Pudenko (2003) created a typology for community, mostly in terms of online communities, but based on two variables: the strength of the social bond and the gathering's intentionality. The four types of communities they identified, arranged from the least socially cohesive and intention to gather to the most cohesive and socially bonded, are as follows:

(1) *Community of interest.* Members gather around a common topic of interest.

Knowledge construction is for individual use. It is low in both strength of social bond and the gathering's intentionality.

(2) *Goal-oriented community of interest*. Members gather around a common topic of interest and are created to carry out a specific mandate to be achieved usually in a particular timeframe (e.g., task force). Sharing of diverse perspectives and production of objects is typically commissioned by the mandate. It is higher in strength of social bond and the gathering's intentionality than the community of interest.

(3) *Learners' community*. This community operates in instructional contexts and is composed by students who depend on instructor(s) for guidance. Participation involves completing a collective project. It is medium to high strength of social bond and the gathering's intentionality.

(4) *Community of practice*. It is organized around professionals who work in organizations where they perform similar activities. Involves sharing knowledge among members. It is high in both strength of social bond and the gathering's intentionality.

(Henri & Pudelko, 2003, p. 485)

The idea of community identified by Rovai and from the work of Henri and Pudelko leads very closely into conceptions of learning communities, or what Sergiovanni (1994) calls “communities of inquiry” (p. 144). Palmer (1997) notes, however, that “like teaching itself, creating educational community can never be reduced to technique” (p. 4). Community emerges from a principle that can express itself in endless varieties, creating a sense of connectedness through lectures, lab exercises, fieldwork, service learning, electronic media, and many other pedagogies (Palmer, 1997). A common definition of learning community is provided by Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990). They state that

Learning communities, as we define them, purposefully restructure the curriculum to link together courses or course work so that students find greater coherence in what they are

learning as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students . . .

learning communities are also usually associated with collaborative and active

approaches to learning, some form of team teaching, and interdisciplinary themes. (p. 5)

Two of these authors, MacGregor and Smith (2005), reexamined learning communities by surveying campus leaders involved with learning communities to find out how the learning community movement had evolved over time. They identified fifteen lessons learned about learning communities. Among the lessons learned, they found that learning communities have arrived as a national movement; have taken hold because they are flexible; have become locations for faculty, staff, and student development; have become important seedbeds for pedagogical innovation; and have built strong links between disciplines and divisions. They also noted that to sustain learning communities entails vigilance about logistical considerations and requires a larger vision with continual rethinking and reinvention. Learning communities can only be successful, they say, if it is a team effort, depending on leaders drawn from across campus and investing in faculty and staff development. Finally, they note that change is difficult and educators must be willing to change as they ask students to change, they must recognize that the emotional side of change matters and change agents need the perspective and support of allies and mentors.

Oates and Leavitt (2003) identify the variety of forms found in various learning communities, ranging from one cohort of students taking the same set of two courses to more elaborate linkages bringing faculty together with students taking the same courses and living in the same residence hall. Freshman seminars, a type of learning community, are defined by Oates and Leavitt as four independent courses linked to a freshman integrative seminar for the students' first semester offering, while a cluster of coordinated studies is where all courses for

the semester are linked together for the same cohort of students. Many of these learning communities also incorporate service-learning, where students in the cohort complete community service projects as part of the learning community experience, which Oates and Leavitt argue is a natural progression to help shift learning from passive to active participation. They make the distinction that while there is variety in the types of learning communities offered, all learning communities “represent an intentional restructuring of student time and space to foster connections among courses and collaborative work with fellow students and faculty” (p. 7).

There are many reasons why educators get involved with learning communities. Klein (2000) notes that many teachers are drawn to learning communities because they emphasize team and thematic teaching and the connection that students build with one another in socially supportive networks. Pastors (2006) highlights the benefits of learning communities found in the literature. He states that students involved in learning communities have greater levels of persistence, greater interaction with faculty, increased interactions with peers, and are better able to integrate their undergraduate experiences into an organized learning process. He continues by saying that

Students report that they are more engaged in active learning in learning communities than they are in more traditional classes and that they feel they have made greater intellectual gains than similar students in non-LC settings . . . [and] report that they perceive the benefits of the LC experience as primarily social – meeting people, making friends, and socializing in the new college context. (p. 1)

As additional support, the 2002 report of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) revealed that participating in learning communities was positively related to the five benchmarks

studied in the NSSE, providing diversity of experiences, gains in personal and social development, practical competence, and general education, and overall satisfaction with the undergraduate college experience (Carnegie Foundation, 2002, p. 23).

Because learning communities have proven successful in confronting problems associated with retention, some scholars have explored their usefulness in online education, which DiRamio and Wolverton (2006) argue is necessary given high attrition rates associated with distance education where students report a sense of isolation and remoteness. DiRamio and Wolverton found that learning community principles relating to student interaction, such as using group projects to promote collaborative learning and integrating a social activity into the online class, rated highest. While examining the usefulness of learning communities in online education may be important, Henri and Pudelko (2003) made the distinction that “all virtual communities are learning communities because their members learn while taking part in their activity” (p. 476). This distinction suggests that virtual communities should be explored further to improve on the retention issues suggested by DiRamio and Wolverton (2006). Though this study does not examine learning communities, per se, learning communities are built on the pedagogical and cultural theories that are shared by communities found in education in general: active learning, cognitive development, constructivism, integrative and interdisciplinary education, critical literacy, multiculturalism, writing and thinking across the curriculum, and participatory, community-based democracy (Klein, 2000, p. 18).

Online Community.

Metaphors such as cyber community (Jones, 1997), Cyberville (Horn, 1998), and virtual community (Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Herring, 2004; Schwier, 2001) have been used in

discussions of online communities. The elements of online communities, identified by Palloff and Pratt (1999, 2003, 2005, and 2007), are:

1. People: The students, faculty, and staff involved in an online course;
2. Shared purpose: Coming together to take an online course, including sharing information, interests, and resources;
3. Guidelines: Create the structure for the online course, by providing the ground rules for interaction and participation;
4. Technology: The vehicle for delivery of the course and a place where everyone involved can meet;
5. Collaborative learning: Student-to-student interaction that also supports socially constructed meaning and creation of knowledge;
6. Reflective practice: Promoting transformative learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2005, p. 8); and
7. Social presence: The degree to which someone is perceived as “real” in communication that is conducted via the use of some form of media (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 30)

Palloff and Pratt (2007) argue that entering virtual communities and maintaining membership in these communities entails a very different process and may be more difficult for some people to achieve.

In fact, Jones (1998) notes that creating online personas is a difficult process, one that is complicated when people invent new and multiple personas, which creates a detached identity for users. He discusses that in an online community you can be whoever you want to be, referencing a well-known New Yorker cartoon that brought this point home. Its caption is “On

the Internet no one knows you're a dog" (p. 136). Individuals therefore shape their own community "by choosing which other communities to belong to" (Jones, 1998, p. 3) and how to represent themselves in these online communities. This idea has become the last feature of online communities listed above, i.e. social presence. While a perception is created about how "real" a person is in their online communication, Palloff and Pratt's research shows that one's personality changes when interacting with technology. Introverts, who may have a problem establishing a presence in person, may become more extroverted and establish presence easily, while extroverts may have problems connecting to others online. Their work has shown that for an electronic personality to exist, certain elements must manifest:

1. The ability to carry on an internal dialogue in order to formulate responses;
2. The creation of a semblance of privacy both in terms of the space from which the person communicates and the ability to create an internal sense of privacy;
3. The ability to deal with emotional issues in textual form;
4. The ability to create a mental picture of the partner in the communication process;
- and
5. The ability to create a sense of presence online through the personalization of communications (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 29)

Each person can create his or her own virtual environment by allowing his or her electronic personality to emerge. The key, as the researchers mention, is to try to find the "real" online personality so that communication is genuine and so social presence is effective.

Several researchers have devoted their time to online-only learning communities (Barab, Kling & Gray, 2004; Ke, n.d., Luppigini, 2007; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Riesman, Flores, & Edge, 2003; and Wang, Sierra, & Folger, 2003). An online learning community is the "vehicle through

which learning occurs online. Members depend on each other to achieve the learning outcomes for the course” (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 40). Wang, Sierra, and Folger (2003) contributed to the knowledge about online learning communities in relation to how to promote active participation in courses. Their findings indicated that chat rooms utilizing the DigiChat system, where students could develop profiles, pick avatars, and select nicknames for themselves, were useful for increasing active participation, one of the markers they established to indicate community formation. The other markers of community Wang et al. examined were the formation of a shared identity and the establishment of a social network. Team presentations, assignments utilizing collaboration between students, instructors’ promotion of individual discussion leaders, and the inclusion of a profile page for each student on the course homepage, all demonstrated the development of a shared identity and establishment of a social network. These markers, therefore, indicated that community could be built in the online sphere, as well as on a traditional campus. Additionally, Ke (n.d.) discussed the use of virtual learning communities, indicating that an essential framework of a virtual learning community comprises an active learner-directed environment that fosters a climate of learning in a community that includes a process of interaction and participation and where participants develop a feeling or sense of community.

If a community is built successfully in the traditional sense, a social network is developed characterized by participation, trust, shared interests and values, shared responsibility, norms and rituals, and by the ability to embrace differences while forming a group identity (Calderwood, 2000, Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam, 1995, 2000; Westheimer, 1998; as cited in Wang, et al., 2003). Additionally, characteristics of community include “recognition of members and nonmembers, a shared history, a common meeting place, commitment to a common purpose, adoption of normative standards of behavior, and emergence of hierarchy and roles”

(Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins, & Shoemaker, 2000, ¶23). Brown (2001) described the characteristics of online communities very similarly to characteristics included in definitions of traditional communities, including shared purposes, joys, and trials; a sense of belonging and connection with others; a climate of caring; good communication; and continuity (p. 20). She additionally concluded from her interviews with graduate students enrolled in online classes, that “commonality [is] the essence of community” (p. 22).

One form of online communities is a social network site, such as MySpace, Facebook, or Second Life. As of December, 2008, Facebook had 42 million users in the United States, with the number of users growing by 51.3% between July and December 2008 (Burcher, 2008). Second Life is also gaining in popularity, though with just over fifteen million registered users (WebProNews, 2009), it has a long way to go to catch up to Facebook in terms of popularity. Second Life is unique in this grouping because of its classification as a virtual world.

Second Life, or SL, is a three dimensional virtual world where participants develop avatars, cartoon-like representations of themselves, and can then communicate, learn, explore, and live in the virtual world. Researchers have explored the general characteristics of virtual worlds, such as Second Life, and their potential benefits for teaching and learning. Kalyuga (2007) found that virtual worlds are highly interactive. They provide dynamic feedback, learner experimentation, and exploration and provide opportunities for social interaction and collaboration (Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, & Trivedi, 2009). Virtual worlds allow students to “use their experiences to actively construct understanding that makes sense to them, rather than have understanding delivered to them in already organized form” (Polka, 2001, p. 55). Because of this, students are actively engaged and constantly in the process of constructing meaning from their experiences (Kluge & Riley, 2008).

Second Life as a Response

Research about this virtual community is fairly new given its launch in 2003 (Au, 2008), however books and articles have surfaced providing the story about the conception of Second Life (Au, 2008), the experience of “living” among the people of Second Life (Boellstorff, 2008), research on how to teach using Second Life (Golden, 2009; Jarmon, Traphagan, & Mayrath, 2008; O’Connor & Sakshaug, 2009; and Wang & Hsu, 2009), as well as many guides on how to navigate the intricate world of Second Life (Mansfield, 2008; Rufer-Bach, 2009; Rymaszewski, Au, Ondrejka, Platel, Gorden, Cezanne, Cezanne, Batstrone-Cunningham, Krotoski, Trollop, & Rossignol, 2008; and White, 2008). The Second Life website also provides several tutorials and helps new residents navigate through the virtual world. Additionally, the website shares its philosophy on education:

Second Life provides a unique and flexible environment for educators interested in distance learning, computer supported cooperative work, simulation, new media studies, and corporate training. SL provides an opportunity to use simulation in a safe environment to enhance experiential learning, allowing individuals to practice skills, try new ideas, and learn from their mistakes. The ability to prepare for similar real-world experiences by using SL as a simulation has unlimited potential. Students and educators can work together in SL from anywhere in the world as part of a globally networked virtual classroom environment. (Second Life, 2007, cited in Hargis, 2008, p. 58)

Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) argue that Second Life is revolutionizing the way we view education, either as the way we’ll conduct education virtually or as a prototype of some future form of learning. They discuss many different uses of Second Life and claim the reason for its growing acceptance is that it represents an innovative way for learners and

educators to participate in the world and control the learning activities. They stress that a key factor to Second Life's adoption is that "It is conducive to all members (residents) being able to create content, and not just those responsible for courses within educational institutions" (Molka-Danielsen & Deutschmann, 2009, p. 188). Additionally, "interactions in a virtual world [like Second Life] can help to build a sense of community in classes that otherwise might not meet in a face-to-face setting" (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009, p. 59).

This new educational realm may be difficult for some to adapt to, however. As Conrad and Donaldson (2004) note, most learners are comfortable in passive student roles where learning takes place in lecture-based environments. An online learner must, therefore, quickly establish comfort with technology, the text-based communication, and with a higher level of self-direction than in a traditional classroom. It is the instructor's responsibility to make sure learners find others in the learning environment with whom they can build a collaborative relationship, designing course elements that encourage the growth of learners in these new relationships (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). Wang and Hsu (2009) recommend instructors follow the ADDIE model for designing online activities, involving five stages: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. Most important within these stages is the Analysis stage, which involves assessing what students know about technology, their personal computer capabilities, and their motivation for these technological activities. If done correctly, instructors will have an idea of how students will react to educational activities within Second Life, including their ability to learn the program and handle technological difficulties as they arise.

While the ADDIE model is one method for approaching instruction in Second Life, many "designers seem to prefer a game-based learning approach with simulation and interactive features" (Atkinson, 2009, p. 31). Driscoll (2005) provides a foundation for designing effective

instruction in virtual worlds, including learning processes that engage students through exploration and reflection, learning that is embedded in a 3D environment allowing learners to interact through roleplay, learning that is proactive and collaborative, and learning that simulates real life in authentic contexts (cited in Atkinson, 2009). Creating classes in this format requires skills most educators don't have, so development time for courses in Second Life is far beyond what is normally required (Kluge & Riley, 2008).

While using Second Life may require an adjustment period for faculty and students, some of the components of Second Life make exploration of this virtual space useful for online classes. The differentiating component of Second Life, for example, is that it creates a social presence, which is “thought to make learning more of a human experience than most other online environments. Additionally, participants enhance their social presence and feelings of ownership by constructing spaces and personalizing their appearance as animated characters called avatars” (Atkinson, 2009, p. 30). This social presence then increases interaction, which “correlates with engaging learners in instructional activities. To improve interaction in SL, designers should choose those that permit the greatest range of learner control and use” (Atkinson, 2009, p. 31).

Whatever form of community students are a part of, including the virtual worlds discussed here, one thing is certain: The need for community is universal. “A sense of belonging, of continuity, of being connected to others and to ideas and values that make our lives meaningful and significant – these needs are shared by all of us” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xiii). Sergiovanni (1994) says that successful community building depends on each individual school defining for itself its own life and creating its own practice of schooling (p. xv).

Many components of student engagement relate to the concepts of community. Community, as mentioned previously, can refer to the physical space as well as a connection to

those around us. Interaction is a large part of the last distinction of community, which is found repeatedly in the literature about student engagement. Additionally, components of culture, a concept frequently discussed in conjunction with community, such as identity, norms, feelings and shared values, lead students to feel more connected to one another, as evidenced in the work by Stark-Meyerring and Andrews (2006). This connection is essential to student engagement, as discussed in the work by Shin and Chan (2004) previously. Using an online virtual world, such as Second Life, may also increase student engagement, particularly for online classes, by providing opportunities for synchronous, (virtual) face-to-face student-to-faculty and student-to-student interaction (Childress & Braswell, 2006; Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009).

Summary

This chapter reviewed literature from student engagement research, demonstrating the importance of engagement on student success and discussing the challenges for creating engagement in the online environment. The chapter also reviewed literature about community and how this term has changed over time to reflect an online community of learners, including virtual worlds, and the influence of community on student engagement. Based on the literature reviewed, one finds that community is beneficial to students and aids in their engagement with classes and the institution. This in turn leads to higher levels of persistence.

With benefits of community in terms of student engagement outlined, it seems important to examine how the virtual world of Second Life can be useful in terms of building a collegiate community in online courses. These virtual worlds “offer an opportunity for people to interact in a way that conveys a sense of presence lacking in other media” (New Media Consortium, 2007, p. 18) because they “may facilitate collaboration by providing a means of communication that is more like face-to-face communication than other popular technologies such as email, blogs, and

wikis” (Kluge & Riley, 2008, p. 131). This study is therefore significant in that it offers practical contributions to the emerging field of online education. Educators in online instruction have struggled with how to teach in this environment, recognizing that they need to rethink where, what, when and how students learn when in an online course. The traditional view of education where the instructor acts as a “sage on the stage” does not work in online education, where students must take on a much more active and independent role. Faculty members must act more as facilitators in online courses, utilizing pedagogical, social and managerial roles (Morris, Xu, & Finnegan, 2005), where they encourage students to work collaboratively and form learning communities. This research will help connect the research showing positive outcomes from community building, found in student engagement literature, to the online realm. Results from this study may help institutions improve services offered to their online students.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research used a case study approach to try to understand how Second Life augments students' learning experiences in terms of building collegiate community when taking online courses. Specifically, I examined how Second Life could be used as a teaching tool to break down the barriers found in distance education, such as students feeling disconnected from their peers and instructors and resulting in lower retention rates. As Yin (2009) defines it, a case study is an empirical inquiry that (1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when (2) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (p. 18). He goes on to state that the case study inquiry (3) copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result (4) relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result (5) benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p. 18). In terms of this research, the class being taught was the case being studied. It was necessary to examine it in the real-life context, as mentioned in Yin's definition, to see how collegiate community was built in the online realm during the course of the semester. It was unknown how Second Life would affect this process in the various positive and negative outcomes that emerged throughout the semester. It was necessary to participate in the process, collect journal entries where students reflected on their perceptions and experiences, and to interview the students about their experiences so that data could be triangulated. Additionally, as Yin further noted, study questions for case study

research typically takes the form of “how” and “why” (p. 27), which is an important clue that my research falls into a case study approach.

Qualitative methodology was chosen for use in this case study approach because of the flexibility afforded to respond to emergent insights (Maxwell, 2005). Additionally, qualitative methodology is approached with “the view that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds. Thus, there are many ‘realities’ rather than one, observable, measureable reality” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 97). This viewpoint corresponds with the research questions of this study because students’ perceptions of the need for an online collegiate community will vary based on their backgrounds, experiences, expectations, and goals. Additionally, their experience in an educational environment conducted in Second Life will vary based on these variables.

I offered an online Cultural Diversity in Communication course during the fall, 2009, a-term semester at Darton College in Albany, Georgia. An a-term semester is a half-term semester where instruction takes place in about eight weeks, or half of what the regular semester is scheduled for. Within this online course I offered both asynchronous and synchronous class activities, using the course management system for asynchronous class activities, such as the discussion forum, assignment submission, and emails, and using Second Life for synchronous class activities such as social mixers and field trips. I then studied this course and students’ perceptions to this course. It was expected that this course would allow students to acquire a primary understanding of effective communication skills and, because the class satisfies the oral communication competency requirement for the college, the course spent a portion of the time focusing on methods for preparing and delivering effective presentations. The course also introduced students to areas of study, which would expand their knowledge, and appreciation of

the multi-cultural and multi-racial world in which we live and help students learn how to be sensitive to the differences between people.

To accomplish these goals, students were asked to complete four speeches. The first was a self-introduction speech, where students were asked to introduce themselves from a cultural perspective. This speech was an audio-recorded speech to be submitted along with a digital photograph of the student. The second speech was a narrative speech, where students were asked to pick a story that came from a culture other than their own which they videotaped themselves reading or paraphrasing for an audience, along with providing an analysis of the story from several cultural perspectives at the end of its telling. The third speech involved students interviewing a member of a culture different from their own and then delivering a videotaped speech reporting on the most interesting and/or important facts they learned about the new culture. The final speech was a group informative speech where students, divided into two groups, choose a specific cultural dynamic within a culture to focus on and created a voice-over PowerPoint presentation to present their research. Additionally, students were asked to complete 9 quizzes over their assigned readings, participate in the course discussion forum, and complete a final exam. The above assignments and activities were part of the asynchronous nature of the online course. This course also required students to participate in educational activities in Second Life, providing synchronous class experiences for the students. For example, students completed a scavenger hunt around the Second Life world so they could get used to how Second Life works, participated in social mixers and field trips in Second Life assigned by me, and kept a journal to reflect on their Second Life and other course experiences.

Participants

Six students participated in my study. Students had only one prerequisite to fulfill the requirement for Cultural Diversity in Communication at Darton College: they must have passed their learning support English and Reading classes (or have never been required to take these courses). Cultural Diversity in Communication is one of six courses that allow students to satisfy their Oral Communication Competency requirement at the college, though this course is one of the more popular courses for online students to complete to satisfy the requirement. When students registered for this class, I sent them an email to make them aware of the requirements of this class so they would understand the minimum system requirements their computers must meet to be able to participate in Second Life. The email also explained their involvement in Second Life and how Second Life would tie into classroom activities. I tried to discourage certain students from taking this class because of lack of technological resources or lack of computer skills. The criteria important for being a part of this class, however, were:

1. Students must be 18 years old or older;
2. Students should have intermediate computer skills (know how to save documents, attach documents to email, upload documents into WebCT, navigate computer control panel to find information about their computers, download programs onto computers, etc.);
3. Students should have previously taken online courses; and
4. Students should be willing to use Second Life.

I sent an email to all faculty and other advisors about this class during the fall pre-registration period to recruit students for this class and to make sure advisors were telling students about the

requirements for the class. Additionally, I posted a course orientation on the online division's website giving details about the class.

Before the semester began I sent an email to all students explaining my research project and included my contact information and an informed consent form. I also attached a short questionnaire so I could collect contact and demographic information. I also asked students to email me with questions they had about the study and to clarify any confusion they had about the consent form. I asked the students to sign the consent form and send it back to me before the beginning of the semester.

Twenty-one students initially signed up for the course, though this number dropped significantly after the purge for non-paying students, once students realized how much work was involved with the course, and because of lack of technological resources. This is discussed in detail later. Six students completed the course and the interview following the course. Of these students, five were women, four were non-traditional students, four were fully-online students, five were full-time students, four were pre-nursing or nursing majors and all had taken more than one online class. One participant, a full-time Caucasian female student majoring in early childhood education, was 37, and had completed sixteen online classes. When we spoke, she was a semester away from graduation, which she commented was a big feat after starting her degree 17 years previously. This participant, named Tracy for the purposes of this study, was enthusiastic about the college's online program since it had afforded her more flexibility with her schedule. At the time of our interview, Tracy was taking classes fully online to complete her degree.

Another participant, Carrie for the purposes of this study, was a full-time Caucasian female student majoring in nursing. She was 40 years old. She was not taking classes fully online

because of her degree program, which required her to take cohort classes with other nursing majors on campus. She filled in her schedule with online classes, having completed three online classes at the time of our interview. Like Tracy, Carrie had a long road from the start of her courses to graduation, starting student life at Darton College eleven years previously.

Kwan was the only male participant in the study, and also the only international student. He was a full-time pre-nursing major who was from South Korea. His age was under dispute because age is calculated differently by South Koreans, who he explained count newborns as being about one year old. In the U.S. he said he age was considered to be 20, though in South Korea he was thought to be 22. During the interview he told me that my course was the only online class he had ever taken, though his demographic form filled out at the beginning of the semester indicated he had taken two other online classes. He was rather timid during our interview, likely reflecting his culture about not giving your opinion to someone in a “power” position. A teacher falls into this category in his culture.

Three other participants rounded out the study. The first was Amanda. She was a part-time Caucasian student who was taking classes completely online. She was not sure what she wanted her major to be, but said it would either be business or early childhood education. She was 20 years old and had taken over ten online classes. Another participant was Melissa, a full-time, fully online Caucasian student who was majoring in pre-nursing. She was 27 and had completed four online classes. Melissa was very opinionated about the course and the direction of online education and was eager to share her ideas. The final participant was Sarah, who was 33, and also a full-time, fully-online Caucasian student majoring in pre-nursing. She said she had completed nine or ten online classes at the time of our interview. A summary of participants appears in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Summary of Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Major	FT/PT	Online Status	# of Online Classes
Tracy	37	Female	Caucasian	Early Childhood Education	Full-Time	Fully-Online	16
Carrie	40	Female	Caucasian	Nursing	Full-Time	Not Fully-Online	3
Kwan	20 (22)	Male	Asian	Pre-Nursing	Full-Time	Not Fully-Online	3
Amanda	20	Female	Caucasian	Business or Early Childhood Education	Part-Time	Fully-Online	10+
Melissa	27	Female	Caucasian	Pre-Nursing	Full-Time	Fully-Online	4
Sarah	33	Female	Caucasian	Pre-Nursing	Full-Time	Fully-Online	9-10

I planned to use Darton College as my research site for this study so that I could teach this course in the online environment to which I have become accustomed. I began teaching online for the college in 2005 with little experience in distance education. My predecessor at the college had been recognized for her innovation in online course development for teaching a subject many thought was impossible to teach online. I was expected to follow in her footsteps. I taught myself how to use her course shell, stumbled through teaching online for my first couple semesters, took workshops about online education to become more familiar with the tools necessary to help students succeed, and eventually became a more effective online instructor.

Despite my efforts, however, I felt that online classes still lacked the level of engagement I was able to achieve in my campus-based courses.

After teaching online for many years and seeing several weaknesses with this educational format, I set out to address some of these weaknesses in this study. I examined how my college reaches out to its online student population and how instructors attempt to build community in their classes. I looked at how this fits in with the program and college as a whole, what students want and need from their online programs, and how social networking sites, specifically Second Life, can impact student involvement with the college. During the past five and a half years teaching at the college, I have seen many ill-prepared students enrolled in online classes. These students tend to drop these online courses, leading to lower retention and lower student satisfaction. I wanted to know if there is a way to reach out to these students and help them feel more connected to the college and explore whether or not Second Life is a good platform for helping students feel more connected.

I struggled, however, with including myself as a part of this study. Other researchers explored the “rigid boundaries between the personal and the academic” (Hanrahan, Cooper, & Burroughs-Lange, 1999, p. 403), however, confused by the recurring request to be objective and remove personal experiences from an account. The “writing of an autobiography in various forms as become part of educational practice, often with the expectation that this will have therapeutic effects” (Saito, 2009, p. 253), therefore my narrative is included in this research.

Data Collection Methods

I observed students through the WebCT discussion forum, through Second Life events, and through follow up interviews about their experiences. I also analyzed students’ reflection journals about their online experiences. Students were required to post a minimum of twenty

times during the semester to the discussion forum in WebCT about issues relating to cultural diversity and about their experiences in Second Life. I also required them to write at least two substantive reflective journal entries every week about their classroom experiences with a focus on their Second Life experiences. These journal entries were emailed to me or posted in a private journal blog for each individual student weekly so I could keep up with their perceptions and modify classroom experiences to better-fit students' educational needs. I used open-ended interviews at the end of the class to understand their perceptions of the online community of the Cultural Diversity in Communication course. The interviews consisted of 21 structured interview questions (see Appendix A for complete Interview Guide/Protocol). These questions were:

1. What online classes have you taken?
2. What led you to take these classes online?
3. Tell me about your experiences in these classes.
4. How connected did you feel to your instructors? To your peers?
5. What, if anything, did your instructors do to build community within your classes?
6. What did you enjoy about these methods? What didn't you enjoy?
7. Describe your college's culture, including such things as values, beliefs, norms, stories, traditions, symbols, etc.
8. How have you experienced this culture while taking classes online?
9. Who communicated the college culture to you?
10. What did they communicate to you? How did they share the culture with you?
What parts of the culture of your college have been included in your classes and in the online services you've received?

11. What could members of your college do to help you feel a part of the college culture?
12. How might being a part of the college culture during your online coursework help you? How might it hurt you?
13. What do you expect from your institution in terms of creating an online culture?
14. Tell me about your experiences in Second Life during this class.
15. How connected did you feel to your instructor within Second Life? To your peers?
16. What did you enjoy about the activities and/or assignments in Second Life?
17. What didn't you enjoy about the activities and/or assignments in Second Life?
18. What was the culture of the class within Second Life? How did you come to understand this culture?
19. How might social networking sites (such as MySpace, Facebook, Second Life, etc.) help you feel connected to your peers, instructors, and the college community? Explain.
20. Based on your experience in this course and other online courses, what do you think your college can do to improve online education?
21. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your online experiences?

While these questions were asked of all participants, I used these questions as a guide to ensure that the same topics would be covered in each interview, but allowed for flexibility to explore other issues that emerged. I used probe and follow-up questions during the interview. These interviews lasted for 30 to 45 minutes using the semi-structured interview approach outlined above. These interviews were audio recorded and then I transcribed the interviews and wrote

initial reflections about the interviews. I then completed a member check with each student, or a follow-up to the conversation, to check back with the students to make sure I understood what they said to me during the interview.

Data Analysis

Once interviews and member checks were completed, I analyzed the data gathered. I then followed the guidelines for conducting data analysis established by Ruona (2005), which involves four stages: (1) data preparation, (2) familiarization, (3) coding, and (4) generating meaning. To start stage one, data preparation, interviews were transcribed and students were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. The transcriptions were then edited and formatted using Microsoft Office Word, as described by Ruona (2005). This involved formatting what the interviewer said in italics and what the interviewee said in plain text. Spacing between responses was removed and the transcripts were placed into tables with six columns, labeled Code, ID, Q #, Turn #, Data, and Notes. Codes from the coding scheme were assigned based on the themes that emerged in later stages of analysis, provided in Appendix B, for each statement in the transcript. ID refers to the identification numbers for participants and the researcher, to allow readers to tell who was speaking within the coded and organized transcript. Q # refers to the question number in my Interview Guide/Protocol, provided in Appendix A. Turn # refers to the order in which the participant and researcher spoke from the start of the interview to the end. Data refers to what was said during the interview. Finally, notes refers to any additional information that was worth mentioning in the coded transcript, such as mentioning when a statement was coded under more than one code number or recording observations about the participant's actions during the interview.

Stage two, familiarization, involved “reading and rereading the data, and jotting notes and memos about what you see and what you think is going on in the data” (Ruona, 2005, p. 240). In terms of using Microsoft Office Word for this stage, the researcher typed identification numbers for participants and the researcher (for example, AE01 and SF01, indicating the researcher and participant, respectively, for the first interview) into the ID column and typed the question number into the next column. Then the data was analyzed to identify meaningful segments of data to be divided into separate rows in the table until the responses to questions were divided sufficiently to allow coding to begin.

Maxwell (2005) notes that there are several analytic options: “(1) memos, (2) connecting strategies (such as coding and thematic analysis), and (3) connecting strategies (such as narrative analysis)” (p. 96). The most common form of data analysis is coding. One form is to organize the data collected into broader themes and issues (Maxwell, 2005). Ruona (2005) indicates that there are three different types of code development: “theory-driven, prior data or prior research driven, and inductive” (p. 241), or data-driven coding. This study used data-driven coding, which is created from the data collected and is “based entirely on what you find interesting and significant in the data – words, events, processes, or characters that you see and believe capture the essence of what you’re seeking to understand” (Ruona, 2005, p. 242).

To do this, I created a preliminary list of themes that emerged in the data, taking into consideration the organizational and substantive categories of coding defined by Maxwell (2005). Organizational categories are broad areas or issues established prior to interviews and observations that can be anticipated (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). Then substantive categories were determined, which are primarily descriptive (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). In this type of category, I described students’ concepts and beliefs regarding the research problem. Finally, I

determined theoretical categories representing the concepts interesting to me (Maxwell, 2005). This connection analysis “attempts to understand the data (usually, but not necessarily, an interview transcript or other textual material) in context, using various methods to identify the relationships among the different elements of the text” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 98). As categories of data emerged, I took into account the guidelines to consider about coding categories outlined by Ruona (2005). She stated that categories should (1) reflect the purpose of the research, (2) be exhaustive, (3) be mutually exclusive, (4) be sensitizing, and (5) be conceptually congruent (pp. 242-243). Once determined, each category and subcategory was assigned a five-digit number. Then the researcher applied the coding scheme (see Appendix B) to each row in the table. The table containing the data from each interview was then sorted by the number assigned to each coding category and subcategory to allow the researcher to reflect on the data and continue to the next stage: generating meaning. An interview that has been analyzed and coded through stage three in this process can be found in Appendix C. Comments made in students’ journal entries were also coded using this same process to gain an overview of positive and negative perceptions. This entire process allowed me to see trends in the perceptions among students and determine whether responses about community were positive, neutral, or negative.

During the fourth stage, generating meaning, Ruona (2005) encourages researchers to go beyond the codes and data to get at the whole story. She says to think about how the themes fit together and examine patterns that emerge across the themes. During this stage, I moved into generalizing and theorizing. This involved being more creative with thinking through the data and insights gleaned through the analysis process. In this stage, I also incorporated ideas of narrative analysis, which after reading Riessman (2008) seemed fitting. I appreciated her definitions of narratives as relying on extended accounts that are analyzed as complete units

instead of broken down into smaller fragments (p. 12) since, as a communicator, I enjoy hearing the complete message and do not like a message taken out of context. Her description of various approaches to these methods showed me that my story could be part of the research, which was appropriate to this case study since I taught the class and developed relationships with the student participants. In addition, I chose my dissertation topic because I have preconceived notions that online education is inferior to on-campus education (as discussed in my statement of subjectivity), particularly because of student engagement literature, which says that students persist if they feel more connection to their peers and instructors, which happens with more interaction, shared experiences, etc. (Community College Survey for Student Engagement, 2009). In this stage of analysis, I incorporated my perceptions, along with those of my students, as seen in their interviews, journal entries, emails, chat logs of events, and in-class observations, to get at the whole story, as Ruona recommended.

Triangulation typically involves collecting information from a variety of sources and methods. While it is difficult to triangulate data about students' perceptions gained from qualitative interviews, I compared students' perceptions found in the interview to observations made in the classroom and to the students' reflection journals that they wrote in throughout the semester. I viewed the students' actions in Second Life and monitored their activity within this site as a basis for determining the amount of interaction within this site and within the WebCT course page. I compared these observations to students' ideal use as identified in the interviews. Additionally, students reviewed the transcripts of their interviews and compared these transcripts to their reflection journals and offered clarification about their perceptions of social networking sites being used to build online community.

Trustworthiness of Data

It is difficult to assess trustworthiness of qualitative data because of the biases that can occur by participants and researchers. Toma (2006) discusses these problems in qualitative research, drawing on the ideas of positivist inquiry and post positivist inquiry, both of which are based on discovering a reality “differing in that post positivists see the tools to do so as being imperfect, thereby introducing some degree of probability into findings” (p. 408). Qualitative research is therefore unable to measure truth with absolute confidence. Despite these challenges, Toma (2006) discusses how positivists and post positivists use conventional benchmarks of rigor – validity, reliability, generalizability, and objectivity – to qualitative approaches. This discussion continues by suggesting, as Creswell (1998) and Lincoln (1994) do, that qualitative researchers should draw what is useful from various approaches to ensuring rigor in their research. Instead of focusing on validity, reliability, generalizability, and objectivity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that they have (a) “truth value”, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, and (d) neutrality, though they provided operational words for these concepts, settling on (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. These notions are “parallel to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively, in quantitative work but are applicable only when reworked to fit qualitative inquiry” (Toma, 2006, p. 412).

Toma (2006) offers definitions of these notions of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility depends on the degree to which the research rings true to scholars in the field and natives experiencing the phenomenon. Transferability relates to how qualitative work must be useful in illuminating another context, or where the work should be applicable to another setting or group. Dependability “involves accommodating changes in the environment studied and in the research design itself” (Toma, 2006, p. 416). To ensure

dependability, qualitative researchers must use an evolving research design. Finally, confirmability “is the concept that the data can be confirmed by someone other than the researcher” (p. 417).

I attempted to ensure trustworthiness in this study by using member checks and by examining my subjectivity, or potential biases about the study. My biases were explored in a subjectivity statement. This statement of subjectivity, included below, shows my experiences relating to the topic, biases, and assumptions as a way to show how I may have influenced the findings of this research study. The member checks, as mentioned previously, allow students to give feedback about the data collected during interviews and the tentative interpretations of this data by the researcher. This enables students to clarify anything they said if I did not gain the same understanding from the information as the student intended. Additionally, to relate specifically to the notions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, I solicited feedback from scholars involved with distance education, such as the Dean of the Online Division at Darton College and incorporate her ideas into the research design. I demonstrated how this research ties into other contexts, or other distance education settings at other postsecondary institutions, during the discussion of my findings. Because I collected students’ journal entries reflecting on the process throughout the semester, I made changes to the study as it progressed to address the concerns of student participants. Finally, I would encourage others to study this same phenomenon to ensure confirmability.

Statement of Subjectivity

Online education has become prevalent in all levels of higher education in recent years. When I completed my undergraduate work I was not aware of online coursework opportunities, however. I was working on my bachelor of arts in organizational communication as a traditional

college student. I did not have a need for online courses and therefore was unaware of the online possibilities available to me. Additionally, none of my communication courses were taught online at the institution I attended. Each course I took for my major had a very hands-on feel and I enjoyed that interaction with my peers and instructors. I continued my master's degree at the same institution because I wanted to continue the level of interaction I had grown accustomed to.

After I graduated, I started teaching at a community college with limited online course offerings. None of the communication classes offered by my department were taught in this online format and my colleagues expressed disgust at the idea of teaching communication classes online. I agreed, mainly because I was new and didn't know much about how courses worked in the online format. When I started at my present institution, I was thrust into online education. My predecessor had developed a strong presence for online communication classes at the college partially because the president of the college wanted to push online enrollment as a way to increase overall enrollment. I was asked to step in and teach public speaking online during my second semester. I used the course format developed by my predecessor because I figured she knew how an online public speaking class could best be offered.

What I learned during my first semester teaching online courses was that it was difficult to get students involved in online discussions and when they had concerns about the class they emailed me instead of discussing their problem with their peers. I received over 700 emails in one online class that semester. It was overwhelming. I also realized that the interaction that was central to my course experiences was missing in the online format. I did not feel students were getting an authentic communication experience in the online classroom.

To explore how I could engage students in this environment, I started to attend sessions about teaching communication courses online at the National Communication Association

annual convention in 2005. Communication professionals debated the merit of online communication courses, with the majority reflecting my concerns about the lack of authenticity and hands-on nature of traditional communication classes. In addition, several scholars brought up that it was difficult to translate the institution's community to the online classroom, which they felt decreased the connection online students had with the institution. One proponent of online communication classes said that the collegiate community was not important to communicate so long as students were conversing with one another. Since that discussion, however, I read a lot of literature about student engagement, which seemed to indicate that students needed to feel a connection with peers, instructors, services at the institution, and the institution as a whole. Because of this literature and the debates at the annual convention, I thought examining whether or not students could be part of the collegiate community if not on campus would be worthwhile in the context of improving student engagement.

Over the years while I have been teaching online public speaking classes, I have seen students react positively to new approaches that help them connect with their peers, such as using the discussion forum more often and including a class yearbook page where students could learn about one another. Although I have not attempted to incorporate the collegiate community from my institution in online classes due to not knowing how to approach this process, I believe attempts to build a connection between online students and their institution could make a big difference in student engagement and satisfaction with the overall institution, as well as alumni giving in later years.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Teaching online courses can be very challenging. Online instructors have to determine how to deliver course content in a format that lacks face-to-face interaction and frequently diminishes the amount of connection students have with one another and with the instructor. Faculty members are faced with trying new ways to reach their students and testing different approaches for building interaction. This chapter explores the journey I took when I began teaching online. My entry into online instruction was due to my joining an institution that desired increased online presence, but also because I wanted to explore how to develop more compelling online classes. Once I discovered Second Life as an instructional tool I thought would help students be more connected. I will share my experiences building and teaching the class partly in Second Life, along with my students' reactions to their experiences using this virtual world in class.

Journey to Online Education

Online classes were not very popular when I was in college (1996-2002), though they were just starting to be offered. I recall seeing a few online classes on the schedule and wondered who would want to take those classes. Arguably, as a communication major, I enjoyed the interaction in the classroom, and even felt energized by talking with my peers and my instructor. Participating in class activities, observing classroom behavior, and soaking in the essence of the college experience is what made classes fun for me. I thought online classes were for computer geeks. They were for people who preferred to interact with computer screens instead of real, live people. Online classes, surely, were for people who were socially awkward, were introverted,

and who were afraid to share their ideas, and therefore wanted the anonymity of a faceless computer screen. These students, I thought, were isolated. They were not the students that joined student activities or attended sporting events. I thought these students were missing out.

After graduating, I moved to Texas for my first teaching position. I was living in a very poor area, on the border of Mexico, where most students were first-generation college students. The majority of my students did not own computers. When I asked them to write papers and to type their outlines, many were annoyed that they had to take this extra step, knowing this meant they had to spend time in the computer lab. I understood that learning computer skills was an essential component to their career success, however, so I pushed them to take this step and learn the basics of Microsoft Word. Though I wasn't an expert in computers, I spent a large portion of my classes explaining basic computer functions, like how to work a mouse or eject a flash drive. I took for granted that everyone knew how to turn on a computer, open a blank Word document, save a document, and eject a disk. The best reminder of my students' lack of computer skills happened one day when I asked a student to bring up their disk and open the outline they had so far. We opened it and the class talked about it for a while. When we were done I told her she could save and eject the disk. Instead of hitting the button to eject the disk, she held down the power button on the computer, forcing the computer to shut down. She was so unfamiliar with computers that she didn't know the difference between the power and the disk eject button! It was a lesson in patience.

Shortly after starting that position, the college introduced online classes into the schedule. The faculty rebelled. Because I was teaching at an extension campus, I was removed from the major debate, but my colleagues at the main campus kept me informed. Like me, other faculty members experienced the same issues with their students. The student population, they argued,

did not have the computer skills necessary to be successful in online classes. Additionally, many students did not have good study habits, so online classes, where students would be required to be more self-directed in their learning, would be a detriment to their success. The administration at the college stated that they understood the concerns presented, but argued that the students who were unprepared would not have to take online classes. They stated that online classes were needed to help working adults with busy schedules take the necessary classes they needed to graduate.

Despite concerns, online classes were to be implemented the following semester. Our department had a couple meetings to discuss how to teach communication classes in the online format though, and the overall consensus was that it would be largely impossible to recreate an authentic communication experience in an online format. One of my colleagues there offered to test out the first class to see how it went. We all brainstormed methods for making the class work, based on ideas my colleague had heard at the National Communication Association annual convention. Most of the suggestions entailed using the tools in the online learning software that were meant to increase communication, such as the discussion forum. To deliver speeches, students would be asked to send or deliver videotapes of their speeches to the instructor. None of us were thrilled with the preliminary set-up, but figured that we had to let someone try it out to see how it went before knowing how to make adjustments. I found a teaching position at a different institution in Georgia at the same time, however, so I did not get to see the implementation take place.

When I joined my new college in 2005, I was informed very quickly that the college was known as a top digital college. The president was supportive of every technological initiative available and was a big proponent of online education. He wanted to see the college grow

exponentially and one of his strategies for increasing enrollment was to grow the number of online classes offered, so that more programs could be offered fully online, and so the college could begin competing with fully-online universities, such as Kaplan University and the University of Phoenix. Additionally, I found out that my predecessor had won several awards for online teaching, culminating in a National Council of Instructional Administrators Exemplary Initiatives Competition award for the Educational Technology Category, “You Teach What Online?: Teaching Public Speaking Online”. I was under pressure to pick up where she left off.

Because I had never taught online before, I spoke with my division dean about my concerns about online education, many of which I picked up in the debates at my previous institution, but others which centered around my skepticism that teaching communication classes online would be an ineffective substitute for experiencing communication in a face-to-face classroom setting. I planned my speech very carefully because I wanted her to view me as a team player, while at the same time communicating the need to protect the integrity of the communication field by promoting on-campus classes and reexamining the push to move the public speaking classes online. My dean listened carefully and at the end said that she agreed that it is probably difficult to teach speech online, but encouraged me to try using the online course page created by the previous instructor and see how it went. She said that, until I tried teaching online myself, it would be difficult for me to judge if teaching communication classes online was even possible. Though I understood this to be very wise advice, I was nonetheless apprehensive about moving into the online realm.

I was thrust into the online experience the following semester, my second semester at the college, using the award-winning course page set up by the previous instructor. I remember the first time I signed into WebCT, our online course management platform, and clicked on the link

to open my online Public Speaking class. The course opened into a welcome page, announcing the class as a Public Speaking class. It contained about twelve pictures or icons, many which looked foreign to me. There were icons for an orientation, for the syllabus, for assignments, for web links, for something called Audacity, for the library, for speech demos, and many more. My first thought was if I was feeling overwhelmed at the sight of this class upon logging in for the first time, what must the students feel when they begin the class? I decided I would try clicking on every icon and link within the course so that I could figure out how WebCT and this course were set up. As I tried to navigate around the site, however, I quickly found it to be cumbersome. I didn't feel it was set up in a user-friendly fashion, specifically because it wasn't set up in a chronological fashion and seemed to focus too much on being visually appealing instead of being functional. I was frustrated with it.

After taking a break from this new course page, I decided to start again and click on links that seemed most logical to start with from the students' perspective. As I went, I made notes of links, assignments, and pages that I thought might need to be updated. I started learning that the links on the homepage of the course did not necessarily link with the tools contained within WebCT. For example, WebCT had smaller buttons along the side indicating email or discussion forum, which were not included in any of the links in the main area of the course homepage. Though my predecessor had set up a fairly well-developed "frequently asked questions" link which helped address any confusion experienced by previous students, I made notes of some of the features I thought needed additional explanation. After completing this orientation to the online class I would be teaching, I made the changes I needed to and started the semester.

From the beginning, I felt lost. Even though I had taken some time to orient myself to the online course page, it felt like I was a foreign exchange student in a strange land. I was teaching

a class that I had no experience teaching and felt inadequately prepared, which became blatantly obvious when students would email a question, which would require me to research before I could email a response. I typically had to click on several links and figure out where the answer was since I didn't know exactly where to go to within the page to find the answer. It was a very time-consuming process to answer the daily emails rolling in from students. What I found most frustrating, however, was that my students were communicating with me through email by asking questions, but seemed reluctant to communicate with one another. Additionally, I spent most of my time answering questions about technological issues students were having with the course page or with the new programs they were required to use instead of talking about the public speaking process and the role of communication in our lives. I felt like a computer instructor instead of a communication faculty member. When I voiced my frustration to my dean, I was encouraged to just stay a week ahead of my students in terms of course page upkeep and understanding and I would be okay.

Deep down, I was trying to cope with the question everyone kept asking me: "How can you teach public speaking online?" I would answer by sharing the logistics of the class. Students were still required to complete five speeches, just like in on-campus Public Speaking classes, but that some of the speeches were audio-recorded and others were video-recorded. I told my questioners that students were required to have five audience members of friends and/or family, who were to be shown in the videotapes, to help them recreate the same experience as on-campus students. Most of the time, those who asked this question looked at me in disbelief or probed further, indicating their skepticism that this method would be effective, though some shrugged and said that they guessed online education was here to stay so we might as well get used to it. The truth was, I had a problem recreating an authentic communication experience for

my students, one that would allow them to have a connection with one another and to learn how to communicate effectively. A faceless computer screen did not do the trick. If I knew this problem existed, how could I convince others of the effectiveness of this approach?

I decided to take action. I did some research about online education, talked to faculty members who taught online to get ideas for improving my class, and learned about a class offered through a regional university called Facilitating Learning Online, or FLO class, which I thought could provide some basic knowledge about online education. I enrolled immediately, even though my college wouldn't pay for the workshop. The description of the FLO class, provided on the syllabus was, "this E-Teaching class is a facilitated online course designed for teachers at the high school/college level who teach online classes. This E-Course will prepare the instructor with effective teaching strategies for the online environment by leading them through activities, concepts and techniques that encourage effective online teaching". Additionally, the syllabus identified several course goals and/or objectives. The one goal listed was to prepare the potential e-instructor with solutions to issues in online teaching. The syllabus identified four objectives: (1) the learner will identify teaching issues in an online course. (2) The learner will compare and contrast teaching effectiveness online courses taught by traditional classroom instructors. (3) The learner will locate and develop ways to improve student success in the e-classroom. (4) The learner will describe a teacher's role as facilitator in online classes (see Appendix D for complete syllabus). While I thought the overall goal of the class was a worthwhile one, I wondered how a ten-week class could teach us everything we needed to know to solve the issues related to online teaching. I was willing to learn, however, and put the necessary time into the class.

Despite working to learn about the different ways to meet learning objectives in an online class, ways to create authentic learning experiences, methods for using group work in online classes, my midterm e-journal reflected issues I was still having difficulty with the overall concept of online teaching. I wrote:

I have a difficult time putting my philosophy of teaching and learning online together. The main reason I have this difficulty is that I have conflicting opinions about teaching online. My teaching field is communication and I have a strong belief that students need to learn how to communicate by practicing with diverse audiences. In my online public speaking class, students deliver speeches in front of 5 friends or family members while videotaping the entire speech. Most students deliver their speeches to the same group of people throughout the semester because it is a convenient audience. I'm not positive my students get the same benefit from the online class as they do in the traditional classroom.

This is my first experience learning online and I feel out of control since I can't navigate the organizer pages to see behind the scenes. I'm happy that I'm having this experience now though, since I'll be starting a doctoral degree program through UGA in the Fall in the hybrid format. As for facilitating learning online, I have taught only 7 online courses, all public speaking. The first online class I offered was very haphazard. I added information as the semester progressed. I learned about WebCT as the semester wore on. I didn't understand the unique characteristics of the online course. Through the past year, the course has improved, but I know I could do so much more to help my students.

I know that I still need work on the technical aspects of facilitating an online course, but I'm confident that I will learn a lot from this course and be able to put the time into learning how to help my students better.

My comments above reflect the doubts I had about being able to create the authentic communication experience in an online classroom and how I was struggling to come to terms with it in the FLO class. One complaint that I had about the FLO class at the time was that it was not focused on online education, per se, but on education in general. While this was useful information, such as learning how to put together a jeopardy game as an exam review activity, or when we read and then discussed an article about facilitating online discussion, which focused on discussion practices in general and not on ones unique to online education, the most useful of the articles and discussions we had was about authentic activities in online learning (Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2002). This article provided many good ideas for creating authentic activities, such as having real-world relevance, providing the opportunity to collaborate and reflect, and allowing competing solutions and diversity of outcomes. Again, however, these ideas were not exclusive for the online class environment. I felt I used these approaches in my on-campus classes already and that the article only made me mindful of using them in the online classroom.

By the end of the Facilitating Learning Online course, I was still struggling with how to improve my online classes, though I had come away with some ideas to increase interaction and improve assessment techniques. I was most satisfied by the discussion thread in the class about best practices, where we shared tips that worked in our online classes. Though I was frustrated that I couldn't relate to many of the ideas presented because my online course was different in its

goals and design, the gems I learned about, most notably the class yearbook, I figured would be essential to moving in the right direction for improving my online classes.

I began incorporating a class yearbook where students could upload their pictures and autobiographies so their classmates could get to know them the following semester. Students commented that they appreciated putting faces with names, as reported on course evaluations. This, however, didn't necessarily lead students to report a feeling of greater connection to their peers or to me. I added points for discussion forum postings and group project work to further improve connection. While adding a requirement for communication with class participants increased the amount that students talked to one another, the conversations seen in the discussion forum seemed fake, as though students were stretching their comments for the sake of earning points instead of for the purpose of carrying on a real conversation. The connection found in on-campus classes still seemed to be missing.

Second Life Discovered

I continued my quest to find answers for how to help students feel greater connection to their peers and to me. New technologies emerged and communication scholars at the National Communication Association annual conference (2006 & 2007) debated the merits for use in the communication classroom, both in online and campus-based classrooms. I first heard mention of Second Life as a potential teaching tool at the conference in 2007. Some conference attendees were really excited about the possibilities, but one said that it was "just a silly game" and asked how we could promote cartoons in our classes as a serious endeavor. I remember thinking that the professor was likely resistant to technology as a whole and, that because of her age, wouldn't be open to even listening to benefits if they emerged. I decided then that I wanted to explore SL

to see if it would be useful in my classes as a way to increase connection between online students.

Before incorporating Second Life into my classes, I knew I had a lot to learn about this virtual world. I started by purchasing several books about Second Life (Au, 2008; Boellstorff, 2008; Mansfield, 2008; Rufer-Bach, 2009; Rymaszewski, Au, Ondrejka, Platel, Gorden, Cezanne, Cezanne, Batstone-Cunningham, Krotoski, Trollop, & Rossignol, 2008; White, 2008) and learning about the basics of creating an account and an avatar, navigating in world, communicating effectively, managing my inventory, creating my virtual identity, making and spending money, and visiting unique locations on the many islands in Second Life. After reading about some of these basics, I created my own Second Life account and spent several hours that first day learning how to walk and fly and change the appearance of my avatar. Second Life reminded me of playing the video game, The Sims, where you created an avatar whose purpose was to complete tasks, such as getting a job and making friends, to advance in life, or to higher levels in the game. Though Second Life did not require participants to go through certain steps to advance to higher levels, the premise seemed the same in that the avatars were moved in similar ways and could build housing and businesses. In Second Life, however, people were able to actually communicate, whereas the Sims people communicated using a gibberish, or nonsensical, language.

To get a feel for how to use Second Life to communicate or how I could use it in the classroom, I consulted with some colleagues at my college who were working to build the college's land in Second Life. One of them, Andy Lenard, was in the Instructional Technology and Distance Learning Department and had been primarily responsible for building the virtual space for our college in Second Life and the other, Robby Dittmann, was using this space to

recruit students for the Division of Online Learning for the college. Both men were eager to share their experiences and excited that someone else on campus was interested in using the technology. They showed me around the site, explaining what they had built and how they could help build locations for me, if needed. Additionally, they offered to set up a training session for any faculty members who were interested in teaching using Second Life.

Robby set up a training session in a computer classroom a couple of weeks later for me, along with four other faculty members. Before the training session, everyone was encouraged to set up his or her accounts and begin experimenting. We met for an hour, and Robby gave us a tour of the college's site and then provided tips of how to start using Second Life in our classes. He showed us how to "friend" people that we know so that we could tell when they were online and invite them to our location. He said this would be invaluable for when our students were learning to navigate. He teleported with us to several worthwhile locations in Second Life, such as classroom spaces we could use for our classes and exhibits our students may be interested in, along with providing us with names of some of his contacts in world who would be willing to give us some direction.

Building and Teaching the Class in Second Life

Building the course.

With some general knowledge about Second Life under my belt, I began developing a class to teach during the summer 2009 semester using Second Life as a tool. I planned to teach Cultural Diversity in Communication instead of Public Speaking primarily because the discussion topics in Cultural Diversity could be tied into Second Life more completely. I assumed I could find locations in Second Life to serve as field trips for the class to also use as a springboard for class discussion. I began setting up the class like any other online class, looking

back to the online course page I last used to teach Cultural Diversity, talking to other faculty members at the college who teach the class online to gather materials and come up with ideas, looking over the textbook and course materials I have used in the on-campus classroom, and researching teaching methods for Intercultural Communication courses on the Internet.

After speaking with one of my colleagues, we decided to collaborate on the course content of the online course page, merging our last two course pages and tweaking them until we came up with a combination of the two that we thought would be best for the class. The links we came up with for the course were: Course Orientation, Syllabus, Course Schedule, Learning Modules, Assignments, Meet Your Classmates, Ms. Ehlert's Bio, WebHelp, Writing Center, Research Resources, Exams, and Audacity Download. As the semester drew closer, we ran into a roadblock, learning the textbooks had been changed. Instead of working to incorporate Second Life during the summer semester, my colleague and I spent the remaining time reworking the content of the course to fit the new textbook. Instead, I asked students to complete an orientation to Second Life as an extra credit opportunity near the end of the semester to gain some insight into their first experiences with Second Life. Only one student chose to participate, reporting confusion with the navigation system in world, but thinking it may be fun to explore if she had more time.

I spent a lot of time in Second Life working to figure out the navigation system so I could provide tips to my students during the fall semester. I spent more time reading about Second Life and its uses in the classroom, reading that an important aspect of teaching in Second Life was to be much more knowledgeable about Second Life than your students and to have a clear idea of your purpose for using Second Life (Molka-Danielsen & Deutschmann, 2009). As noted earlier, I knew the overall purpose of using Second Life was to discover whether or not it could be used

to build a community of learners not seen in a traditional online class. I wanted to improve engagement of my students with the class, with each other and with me, and with the college. Colleagues at the National Communication Association were reporting initial success and my research about Second Life in the classroom revealed positive outcomes associated with my purpose for using it. I read on a blog, for example, that “one of the main [advantages] is that Second Life really allowed us to create a sense of class community – something that develops fairly naturally in a face-to-face class. So students appeared at class and had that chance to meet each other, something that rarely, if ever, happens in distance education classes [using] previous technologies” (Lamont, 2007). The professor interviewed for this blog mentioned that having a physical representation of each student was important to students being able to establish relationships with one another “because it gave people a way to express something of their personality” and was the icebreaker allowing students to begin to relate to each other (Lamont, 2007). These comments made it seem as though Second Life would extend far past the class yearbook I had established on my online course management page.

As I began setting up my Cultural Diversity class for the fall semester, I paid close attention to my “Course Orientation” page within the course homepage. I started with a general orientation about the course (see Appendix E). In this orientation, I introduced the technology that would be used in the class, gave an overview of assignments students would complete, and answered frequently asked questions. Upon completion of the orientation, students were asked to review the syllabus (see Appendix F) and course schedule (see Appendix G), complete an online course scavenger hunt (see Appendix H), take a course orientation quiz, and orient themselves to the information about Second Life. In terms of orienting students to Second Life, they first encountered a letter requesting course and research participation (see Appendix I). This letter

explained the mix of time spent “in-class” doing discussions and readings, as well as requiring active participation in Second Life. I provided web links to give students more information about Second Life and explained how I would use this class as part of my dissertation. I then advised students to check on the minimum system requirements needed to run Second Life on all computers and then requested students to download Second Life and get started. I encouraged students to contact me with any questions.

I provided students with their informed consent form (see Appendix J) to give them an idea of what I expected from them and what they could expect from me. I linked a discussion forum to this form to allow students to ask questions about my research and additionally emailed each student within the first week of the semester to find out if they had any questions or concerns about the class or my research. The next link under the Second Life orientation took students to a YouTube video walking viewers through the process of creating a Second Life account and getting started in-world (available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zAb4XxnVMM>). Students were given a Quickstart guide (see Appendix K), introducing the technology students would need, showing the menu bars students would see in Second Life, explaining the contextual menu for interacting with objects and people in Second Life, giving directions about moving, seeing, changing appearance, chatting using voice and IMs, making friends, finding new locations, and providing keyboard shortcuts. My hope was that the video and this guide would give them the initial information students needed to be able to participate in the semester’s first social mixer, scheduled eleven days after the start of the semester. I also provided a Student Information form and asked them to complete it within the first week of the class so I would have basic demographic information about them and an idea about their expectations about the class (see Appendix L).

Teaching the course.

Twenty-one students enrolled in the class, though seven of these students did not pay for the class and were purged within three days of the start of the semester. Three more students emailed within the first week after realizing they did not have the required technology for the course. One of these students did not own a computer, even though she had enrolled in an online course. Another student recently had her camcorder stolen and was worried this would hinder her progress in the class. The third student worried from the beginning that her computer would not be able to handle the requirements of Second Life and, despite me offering to help her find an alternate computer or alternate activities to allow her to still complete the class, she decided to withdraw from the class and enroll in another. Despite losing ten students, or about half of my students, during the first week of the class, most of the students who remained seemed enthusiastic about trying Second Life in our course.

Teaching in Second Life proved harder than I expected though. Students experienced many technological problems in the first week. Most students discovered that Second Life loaded very slowly, likely because of an insufficient graphics card. Other problems I encountered were the link to our Second Life location (the SLurl, or a url, uniform resource locator, within Second Life) was not working (which I later found out from our IT Department happened on PCs because of a firewall between the Internet and SL platform) and students who didn't have microphones or speakers installed. Ultimately, I spent my first week of the class answering technology questions, even though I am not a technological expert. It appeared as though a high learning curve existed for this new technology. Not only did students need to learn how to check their computers for compatibility with the new program, they had to learn how to install it, how to begin working it, and how to troubleshoot it, all while also learning the technology associated

with the course management system and learning the requirements of the online course. This took time away from focusing on the content of the course.

After the first week of class, we settled into the asynchronous course activities, with students starting the online learning modules, or lessons, in the course homepage, including participating in discussion forums, completing quizzes over the material covered in the modules, and writing journal entries about what they were learning and their experiences in the class. The first Second Life experience, or synchronous activity, was also scheduled. I planned a social mixer for everyone at a coffeehouse I found on ISTE Island, property of the International Society for Technology in Education. Upon teleporting to the SLurl I provided to my students, I arrived to find one of my students already there in the yard in front of the coffeehouse. We were staring at a large brick building that looked like a traditional academic building found on a college campus, with tall pillars and a staircase leading up to the entry of the building. The student and I said “hello,” when another student appeared and greeted us. We began chatting through text and introduced ourselves in terms of who our Second Life personas were. Other class members slowly arrived. In total, six students ended up participating in the social mixer that night despite all of the technical difficulties. As students arrived everyone worked to figure out how to move our avatars and try out gestures using the arrow keys on our keyboards as we continued to bump into one another and items in Second Life.



Figure 1: Picture of the Coffeehouse on ISTE Island

As we chatted, most of the discussion centered on difficulties the students were having within Second Life. Amanda commented that she couldn't get her person to walk right. Another student, who wasn't in our list of students because he later dropped the class, commented that he had accidentally stripped his guy naked and couldn't fix it correctly. We spent a large chunk of time trying to figure out who was able to use the "talk" feature instead of having to type to talk. I gave directions about which button to hold down to talk as they spoke into their microphones, after asking them to turn on their speakers, and found out that some didn't own microphones, or had speakers that didn't work. Some typed excitedly that they could hear me after I had spoken into my microphone. Ultimately we discovered that since some people couldn't hear the spoken conversation or couldn't participate without a microphone that we would write everything we had to say in the chat box. While typing worked for the purpose of our event, it was difficult in terms of having coherence in the conversation. I found it frustrating to teach in Second Life (see Appendix M for my journal entry reflections on event), primarily because I do not teach about

technology, yet my time was spent answering technological questions. I attempted to answer students' questions, but felt my capabilities fell short of the help they needed.

We decided to make our way to the coffeehouse to talk about Second Life, the class, and get to know one another. I first suggested that everyone add one another as friends and told them how to do this. I asked them to add the students who hadn't shown up yet and gave them their avatar names. Then I asked them to spend five minutes getting to know someone else in the group using a private chat, after giving some instructions on how to have a private chat instead of the public chat we had been having. I circulated answering questions and spent time getting to know the students myself. It felt awkward to communicate with avatars since we weren't making real eye contact, didn't know how or where to position our avatars, and were still trying to figure out what this system was all about. The chat log from the mixer and my journal entry reflections about that evening's festivities reveal that students expressed their apprehension about Second Life repeatedly, especially in connection with how Second Life could impact their grade. Part way through our mixer, I asked what questions they had about Second Life and/or the class and Melissa wondered what the objective was with this, meaning Second Life. I told them that I hoped we'd get to know each other a little better which should help once we got to group projects. They seemed relieved when I asked them to relax and learn Second Life with me. I encouraged them to try and see how it went and helped them understand that I wanted them to succeed, meaning if Second Life weren't working for them I wouldn't force them into it.

We spent some more time talking about other technology in the class, such as the software program they were to use to audio-record their first speech. Several mentioned they had difficulties downloading it and one student suggesting getting help from the IT department on campus. I walked them through the process of saving the file to send to me. Before we ended the

mixer, we talked about the next Second Life event. I told them that they would be completing a scavenger hunt on their own, to which one student laughed and said that would be interesting. Sarah asked how that would work. I said that I would email details that week, but that basically I would give them a list of places or objects to find and the exercise would help them become more familiar with navigating Second Life.

While the social mixer felt awkward and we didn't have a good flow to the conversation or seem to understand the netiquette of holding a text chat with a group of people at once, the students posed several worthwhile questions, keeping me busy helping them with figuring out microphones and friending off-line students, answering questions about class assignments, and spending time with each of them to briefly get to know a little about them. It was exciting and confusing all at the same time, with new messages constantly coming through. The mixer showed the importance of paying close attention to what was going on, otherwise it was easy to miss a question or comment that needed a response. The mixer left me eager to see how the class would respond to future Second Life activities. Before we logged off, I offered to be available on Second Life at a certain time every week to answer questions if they needed more live contact.

I followed up with the students the following day in our discussion forum on our course homepage. I posted an update that six of us had participated in the social mixer and thanked them for coming. Then I asked them to tell us what they thought about Second Life, including what they liked, didn't like, and what we should try differently next time. Each person who responded said it was interesting and then, in his or her own way, expressed frustration that they didn't know what they were doing. A couple said that once they became more familiar with Second Life they would feel more comfortable with it. Melissa said, however, that her concern was having the time to dedicate to learning Second Life in addition to her other assignments and

other classes. Two others said they knew they just needed the practice to navigate the system, with Kwan saying that after our mixer he found a veteran Second Lifer who showed him around and taught him a lot about how to use it. We also discovered that one of our missing students, Tracy, ran into a new technology problem: dial-up Internet. She said it hadn't worked well enough to allow her to connect to our mixer. Overall, it sounded like the students were willing to try using Second Life, but worried about the time commitment involved.

Students were asked to complete a scavenger hunt in Second Life the following week. They were asked to complete six tasks: (1) to find "Help Island Public" where they would find tutorials about how to function in Second Life and could request help from Second Life mentors; (2) to go to the exit beacon and tell me what color the beacon was and then click on the link to exit. Then they were to tell me where the link to exit took them by giving me the name of this new world; (3) to search for a culturally inspired event or location using the "showcase" search tool and provide the SLurl provided under the map in the location they found; (4) to find a free helicopter ride, take the tour, and tell me what unusual object appears in the sky; (5) to search for another location of their choosing, take a snapshot of a nice image from this location, and email it to me; (6) to propose the next meeting location for our social mixer and provide the SLurl for the location.

A couple of people had difficulties with the scavenger hunt, with Tracy posting in our discussion forum, "Wow...and I thought 2nd life was confusing before. I'm trying to do the scavenger hunt on second life but I'm having some trouble. If anyone has done it or would like to meet up with me in Second Life and try to help each other please let me know. I've gotten to the beacon on Help Island but once I click on the link to transport I don't think it's sending me to the right place. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated." I went into Second Life to see if

I could help and posted that once she clicked on the exit beacon it should give her a note card, which would provide a link to the next location. I didn't hear back from her, however, and never received her scavenger hunt. In fact, I only received two complete scavenger hunts. It was interesting to see the snapshots provided by my students (see Figures 2 and 3 below). The students who completed it said the hunt helped them learn how to navigate, but others never responded to queries about the missing assignment. It seemed as though the students were trying to prioritize assignments worth more points during the semester, so many opted out of this activity.



Figure 2: Snapshot Taken During Second Life Scavenger Hunt Activity



Figure 3: Snapshot Taken During Scavenger Hunt Activity

A journal entry due the following week asked students to reflect on their class experiences to date and to discuss what they had learned that they could use in their daily lives. This journal entry included a question asking them to tell me about their experience in Second Life and to tell me whether or not there was a culture in Second Life and, if so, to describe the culture. Students overwhelmingly responded positively to having learned quite a bit about culture and provided great examples of how this information was useful in their lives. When it came to telling me about their Second Life experience, however, students continued to express their frustration. Tracy said that Second Life had been somewhat tricky for her because the online gaming and chatting experience was new to her. She said that she loved the idea of Second Life and what it represented, but that with anything new she had no idea what she was doing. She said she spent her time wandering aimlessly and that, while she had attempted some things like altering her appearance and moving amongst the different worlds, she didn't think she had

accomplished much. She said she had attempted the scavenger hunt three times without success and hoped to become more proficient inside Second Life just by spending more time once her schedule allowed her to spend more time. Carrie said that Second Life had been a thorn in her side. She said that she resented the fact that she had to spend time figuring it out when she could instead be spending time with the people she cared about.

In terms of describing a culture of Second Life, Tracy said that Second Life was a culture in itself, though there were also different cultures or groups throughout Second Life. She said there is an overall language used in Second Life “that if you are new to gaming or chatting may be hard to comprehend. There are abbreviations and slangs that you may not understand. There are certain norms for Second Life and the cultures represented there.” Carrie said there was a distinct culture, “the computer literate folks that enjoy spending their time on a computer instead of with actual people.”

In the week following the scavenger hunt activity, four more students dropped the class. I did not receive any emails or phone calls from them notifying me why they were dropping the class, so it is difficult to know if they dropped because of technological issues with Second Life or if I was experiencing the normal attrition rates found in classes as the workload increased. One student, who was completing the work and continued to ask questions to ensure he was doing everything correctly, however, mentioned in one of his journal entries that, “Second Life sucks more than anything in the entire class. It lags so much more than I want it to and gets very frustrating every day I use it. Not to mention I have to do the scavenger hunt that I still have yet to do because I am procrastinating beyond all mention.” I emailed him to try to address his concerns, but my guess is that it became too much for him to handle and he chose to drop the class.

During past semesters when I taught online, I noticed students drop nearing the middle of the semester, or around the time of the third speech of the semester when students realized they couldn't keep up with the work involved. Without being able to survey the students who disappeared from my roster, I am unable to know the exact reason for their departure; however, I was left with only six total students in the class. This attrition rate was extreme in comparison to previous semesters, however communication courses at the college have traditionally experienced higher-than-average attrition rates than other online courses. The professors in the department, in conjunction with the Dean of the Online Division, have completed assessments of the courses to determine why this attrition rate is so high, determining there is a correlation between the number and depth of technology required of students to use to complete the course and attrition rate.

In preparation for their third speech, students were asked to interview someone from a culture other than their own and learn about their culture by asking about how they spend their free time, traditions, and how their education system works. Their speech was to report on what they had learned. I informed them that an easy option for completing their interview would be to interview a Second Life member, focusing on asking questions related to learning about the Second Life culture. Though I thought this would give students an easy interview option, none of the remaining six students choose to interview a member of Second Life for this speech.

A social mixer scheduled a week later did not have anyone in attendance. Several students cited work conflicts, Kwan said he was sick, and Sarah said she mixed up the dates, though it was disappointing to see no one take it seriously. I sent an email (see Appendix N) to all students reminding them about Second Life participation as part of their grade, but also about how these meetings were a time to talk with peers and discuss course content, ask questions,

learn from one another and from me, and to continue to get to know one another so that it would be easier at the end of the semester when working on the group project. Students responded positively to the email, recommitting to their Second Life participation.

Another Second Life activity was scheduled for nine days later: a field trip at the Smithsonian Museum of Latino Studies in Second Life. The purpose of the field trip was to give students exposure to a cultural artifact in Second Life, but to also allow us some time to discuss the final group project in the class. The field trip was scheduled two weeks before the students' final project was due. Because a couple of students had cited issues being able to find us during previous Second Life events, I emailed multiple ways for students to locate our group for the field trip (see Appendix O). Upon entering the Smithsonian Museum, we found ourselves in what looked to be an adobe basement. This location has since changed, so the snapshot of what we saw is unavailable. For a view of what it looks like now, see Figure 4. There were signs on the walls giving instructions for visitors about the best way to navigate the museum and how to move to the location of the actual museum on the main floor. Four of the six students showed up. Instead of taking the tour of the museum, our Second Life meeting turned into a question and answer period about the group project and a brainstorming session for group members about their project. We stayed in the adobe basement, with a tour guide waiting nearby in case we had questions about the museum. I was happy to see that Second Life facilitated more communication among the students, even if it wasn't for the purpose originally intended.



Figure 4: Snapshot of Smithsonian Latino Virtual Museum

During our meeting, I talked to the students about the format of their group project. I had originally planned for them to deliver their group speech in Second Life. I posted two tutorial links for them in our course homepage under speech assignments about how to give PowerPoint presentations in Second Life (available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAbFkPOjg5w> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eER2FM-OChM>). After hearing so many concerns from my students about using Second Life throughout the semester, I decided to change the format of their speech so they could develop a voice-over PowerPoint presentation instead. They found out I truly meant what I had said at the beginning of the semester about not forcing Second Life on them if it wasn't working. I was able to inform most of the group of the change at the last social mixer, but sent an email to the remaining students the following day. I did, however, offer both groups extra credit if they chose to deliver their speech in Second Life and posted web tutorials about how to accomplish this for their use.

Unfortunately, neither of the groups chose to attempt the PowerPoint presentation in Second Life, but the groups did well on their presentations. The group whose members all showed up at the last social mixer (consisting of Carrie, Melissa, and Kwan), and therefore had more time to talk about the project and work through some of the details of the project, by far had the best presentation. It was obvious they communicated about the requirements, with each choosing a specific cultural dynamic to discuss, emailing me with their proposed outline by the deadline set in the assignment guidelines, and putting together PowerPoint slides that included an introduction, conclusion, and voice-over for each part of the presentation. The other group, consisting of Tracy, Sarah, and Amanda, had to be prompted to send their topic and outline for approval, did not meet the deadline for the assignment, and turned in a project that was not combined into one complete PowerPoint presentation, even though I gave both groups extra time to complete their projects.

Interviews

After the completion of the semester, I interviewed each of the remaining students from the class. As mentioned previously, by the end of the semester, enrollment in my class dwindled from twenty-one down to six. I was not able to contact the students who dropped the class to know the reasons for their withdrawal. Online classes typically have lower retention rates compared to on-campus classes in general, but the drop rate for this class was exceptionally high. The students described their experiences with online education, including the connection they felt with their instructors, peers, and with the college. They also described their perceptions of Second Life, discussing any issues they had with the program, along with how using Second Life impacted the class and the connection they felt with their instructor, peers, and the college. Upon completion of these interviews, transcription of these interviews, writing initial reactions to the

interviews, and member checks with the students, I was able to code the interviews and recognize themes that emerged from the students' comments. Five themes emerged:

1. Online students have different needs
2. Coming to campus makes a difference
3. Building community depends on the efforts of the instructor
4. Students feel connected when communicating
5. Second Life can be useful, but there are many problems with the program

These themes will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Online Students Have Different Needs.

Two-thirds of the students were non-traditional students, those beyond the typical college-age student with families and jobs. Sarah, Melissa, Carrie, and Tracy ranged in age from 27 to 40 and were going back to school to help their families have a better future. Melissa commented, in reference to the different expectations of online, non-traditional students, "We're all kind of independent and have different things going on and careers, children, husbands, wives, whatever and just try to do the best we can at getting things done." She also commented that online classes gave her more flexibility with her competing priorities,

This is done at my convenience and it's just me and the instructor. Yes, you do still interact with your fellow students but it's not like coming to the campus and having to have a certain time that you're there. So it's just the freedom of it.

When asked why she takes her classes online, Sarah mentioned living a distance from the campus and working to raise her family, though said once her core classes were finished she would rely on her mom to fill in the gap while she traveled to campus to start attending her nursing classes. When asked the same question, Tracy responded,

Because I work 40 hours a week and I don't get off until 5:00 every day, and it enables me to be able to come back to school. I wouldn't have been able to come back if it wasn't for online classes.

She continued by talking about completing her homework in the evening, around 7 until 10 p.m. when the kids were getting ready for bed or in bed. She said that going back to school had become a family affair, though, and mentioned how her son got involved in her studies:

He loves science. So when I took the Foundations of Physical Science, we had to build a rocket. He was right there with me the whole time. He loved it. We had so much fun doing that. That's the good thing about these kinds of classes. You can incorporate your family into doing stuff.

Several stated they started their classes many years before the semester of our study, with Carrie talking about starting 11 years previously. She mentioned her frustration with being in school so long and gave an example:

Like when they changed our system this time, the WebCT system changed, oh, it was very frustrating for all of us. And I don't know if that was my age . . . you get accustomed to finding something in one place and then they move it. And then it's like, 'Oh, my God, where's it at?' . . . when I started I went to class, took notes, came home, studied and took my tests. Coming back this time, everything's on the computer, so it was a little different. And I'm sure that there was some frustration there. And being nervous and scared and not really necessarily knowing what I was doing.

Tracy also started her education years before our class. She said she had been in college on and off again, having "started this 17 years ago." She said that having a family delayed her original

plans, but that she felt she could take on more classes now that her kids were older. She spoke very enthusiastically about her ability to be back in school after so much time.

Some students mentioned their reasons for taking online classes. Carrie said, “When I’ve taken online classes, it’s a means to an end...it was where I needed it to be, and I needed to have this class, I needed to finish, so on, so forth.” She later went on to talk about not needing to be involved on campus: “I don’t come to hang out...I’m older, I have a family, I have children, I go to school, I get what I get, I leave.” Melissa echoed similar sentiments:

You’re either here to further your career, get something done – most of the people that are taking online classes already have so many things going on that this is just a way for them to further their education without having to do it the traditional way.

Tracy brought up the reputation of our college’s online program, stating that she talks about it at work all the time:

They’ve got great online programs. Here I am, a 37-year-old mother with two-children. I can go back to school and I can stay home with my kids in the evenings.” And a lot of people, they don’t realize that. When I was thinking about going back to school, I checked with Darton to see what they had, and I saw that it was online – there’s a lot of degrees that you can get online.

These students referred to their other priorities multiple times throughout the interview, making it clear that, while their education was important to them, they did not need to be involved on campus to get what they needed from their education. To refer back to the idea of collegiate community, if the idea of community is place-bound, meaning that people must be in a common physical space in order to be a part of the community, then these students were pretty clear that they did not have time to pursue being part of that community. A few stated that some

courses would have been more effective if taken on campus so they would have had face-to-face time with instructors, however the flexibility afforded to them in online instruction seemed to outweigh the benefits face-to-face instruction could provide.

Coming To Campus Makes A Difference.

My study largely centered on the idea that online education was inferior to on-campus education, as noted previously in my Statement of Subjectivity. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reported similar findings, comparing students who live on campus, versus those who commute to college:

Living on campus (versus commuting to college) is perhaps the single most consistent within-college determinant of impact . . . Residential living is positively, if modestly, linked to increases in aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual values; a liberalizing of social, political, and religious values and attitudes; increases in self-concept, intellectual orientation, autonomy, and independence; gains in tolerance, empathy, and ability to relate to others; persistence in college; and bachelor's degree attainment. (p. 610)

Students in my study, though most were taking classes fully online, continued to comment that coming to campus made a difference in feeling connected to the college. Melissa, for example, said that only the students who are in the area and go to the campus some could feel a part of the college. She cited an example of one of the other students in our class, Carrie, who occasionally came to campus and said that allowed Carrie to be “a little more in touch with what was going on with instructors and stuff” but thought that it “just depends on where you’re at and how involved you get, how much you want to be in contact with Darton and with the community.”

Carrie said her online classes didn’t offer a way to experience the college, or collegiate, community and discussed her experiences in the Nursing program to demonstrate how her

connection to the college was shaped through her involvement with the cohort of nursing students. She said that communicating with her classmates made the difference, which she noticed more in on-campus situations:

I am a very social person. I'm very verbal. I like to know who's doing what, and what's going on, and that kind of thing. With an online class, it's just more difficult. With a traditional in-class class, you get to meet everybody, you talk to everybody, you study together, whatever. With an online class, I think it's harder to make those ties because you don't see these people.

Tracy said that the only way she was able to experience a connection with the college in her online classes was when she had to come to campus to take tests. She said,

I think that enables me to get the feel of it and being able to share with the other students that's doing the same thing that I'm doing. I think that's the key thing, because though everything's strictly online, it's nice to come out here and, I guess, experience it with other people.

When I pressed Tracy about whether or not online students could feel a part of the collegiate community without ever stepping foot on campus, she said she didn't think it was possible. She said,

I don't think that you would be able to get the feel of what Darton truly is – you can read it online, any mission statements they may have, or their goals and stuff like that, or you could read it in the book, but if you're strictly, strictly online and you're never able to witness the campus, you can miss out on a lot because there's a lot that goes on out here. They have a lot of stuff. They have different programs. They have after-hours stuff, the fun part, things like that that students can participate in.

Amanda mentioned how some instructors offered extra credit for attendance at campus events and said, “I think that if instructors continue to push all the great things that do occur here and encourage online students participating in all those great things, I think those students would benefit greatly in that.” Other students also mentioned the emails they received from instructors publicizing campus events. Melissa said, “I got emails. There’s all kinds of invitations to attend this and attend that, and this is going on and that’s going on. I feel like you did, it’s just whether or not the person has the initiative or can.”

The on-campus component seemed to be key in the above statements. Tracy stressed interaction as a cornerstone to the collegiate community, “There are ways to feel connected just through interaction with the other students. I think that’s real key. Just interacting with the other students gives you an idea of what the culture of the college is,” she said. Melissa summarized the need for a collegiate community for students who wanted to be involved. She said, “I guess if you’re really wanting more of a college experience then that would be what you would want. You still have to have the flexibility. Then you could really appreciate [the community].” Melissa also said, however, that not everyone wanted to be a part of the collegiate community and used herself as an example:

For me, someone who is trying to get my core classes out of the way, and just want the credit and to do as little as possible to get in and get out, or get a certain grade in the class, I guess it would be less applicable to me, my situation. So I would just caution that you not let students like me that were less interested in [the community] – not to let that kind of befuddle them.

Melissa also said that if she didn't have so much going on, however, she "might have made more of an initiative to talk with other people, see what was going on and get to know some of the people, but I really didn't have time for it."

Though Melissa continually mentioned that she didn't need to be a part of the collegiate community while taking online courses, she offered the only suggestion for pulling the collegiate community into the online experience:

If you had more video feeds, or even audio feeds, that were live, where there's more live interaction, that probably would be the best way [to pull the community into the online] just because that allows for people's schedules, but it still gets people to be here in a way.

Ultimately, these comments suggest that being on campus is important for being part of the collegiate community, with several students suggesting that community is missing in online education.

Efforts of Instructor.

In online classes, the most important person to these students is the instructor. The instructor can make or break their experience. Amanda gave an example of emailing her Macroeconomics instructor about a homework assignment because he had listed two different numbers from two different chapters in error. She stated the instructor never answered her so she just picked one to complete. She said, "So teachers like that, it's hard to enjoy their class because you don't know." On the flip side she said, "The instructors who do talk to you more and respond and are great at interaction, you tend to enjoy their classes more." Sarah recounted a similar example, mentioning that she emailed her Microbiology professor and had yet to hear a response to any of her emails. She said, "So it's kind of like you wonder if he's getting it." Melissa discussed her experiences with an ambiguous online class orientation that left her and

other students questioning what to do. A classmate called to ask her about it and she recounted the experience:

“What am I doing? I did [the] orientation but I have no idea what I’m supposed to be doing. Is this this and is that that?” and I tried to catch her up on everything. She’s like, “Well, how do I know when my assignment’s due?”. I just feel like the orientation could be done a little bit differently...For both of us, we’re both LPNs and neither one of us knew what we were doing. We were like, “What?”

She went on to mention that when the instructor is unclear about what they expect, and isn’t there to answer questions and remind students about what to do, then it is difficult to succeed as an online student. She mentioned that she and the other nursing students try to help each other pick the best instructors to help them through their program.

Students indicated that the instructor’s efforts went a long way to building community in the class and helping them feel connected to the college. I felt fortunate that some of the students referred to the ways I had helped them build community. Carrie said,

I like the way that you posted the pictures of everyone, and that you invited everybody to come to Second Life, the scavenger hunts, and you were always there, and you always put yourself out there for questions or if we needed anything, you were available. I think with Second Life, when we all gathered and you kind of introduced everybody, that was real helpful I thought.

Carrie’s comments reflected the idea that the instructor can encourage students to participate and can be the glue that holds the students together in a form of community. Sarah also mentioned the class yearbook I use as a method to build community or help students feel connected to each other. She said, “the biggest thing was seeing. When you put the pictures of us on there, that was

like, ‘wow’...then you realized who the person was.” Seeing the other students and getting a sense of who they are helped the students feel more connected, and therefore part of a community.

Sarah also echoed similar sentiments to what Carrie said above, comparing my class to others she’s experienced:

Well, for instance, in your class, you always get back to us right away. You really were connected with our class, and that is a big help to anybody because some of them don’t. I guess it just depends on the class. Some of them were really helpful and some of them were kind of “here’s the information and just sink or swim.”

When asked what members of the college could do to help her feel a part of the college, Melissa responded that I had made her feel a part of the collegiate community:

I feel like you did it. I got emails. There’s all kinds of invitations to attend this and attend that, and this is going on and that’s going on. I feel like you did, it’s just whether or not the person has the initiative to or can.

She went on to say that she thought the instructors use of discussion forums and group projects helped with this too because these methods helped students talk with other classmates.

While the efforts of the instructor matter to online students, there were mixed feelings about the need for a connection with peers in online classes. Some mentioned they didn’t really need interaction with their peers. Amanda was very blunt about her feelings on this subject, stating, “[I] don’t care to really talk to them and that’s how I feel.” Sarah, on the other hand, mentioned that she missed being with other people. She said, “that’s probably the biggest downfall for me is the support system that you miss out on.”

Despite mixed feelings about the need for connection with other students in online classes, Carrie summed up the importance of the instructor in the class nicely:

I think it's up to the professor, or whomever is teaching the class to make it where you get more out of it, other than just you go, you pick up your assignment, you do what you're supposed to do and get out. I wouldn't say they're bad, I just would say they're different depending on who's teaching it...the experience you get from the class comes directly from whoever's teaching it.

This comment and others seem to point to the idea that an online classroom can have a sense of community, lead by the efforts of the instructor, but that this feeling of community is not necessarily part of the larger collegiate community. The members construct the community.

Communication Leads To Connection.

Nothing seemed more important to students than communication. As seen in some of the comments above, students were aggravated when they did not receive replies from instructors about assignments or hear back about grades on exams. They mentioned face-to-face communication as the ideal form of communication, even though all of them were in online classes. A couple mentioned their preference for on-campus classes for this reason. Sarah said, "I think you get more from [an on-campus] class because you have one-on-one with a professor, you can stay after class and talk to them." When we talked about how social networking sites could connect students to the collegiate community, Carrie said she didn't know she would use them. When asked why, she stated, "Because I'd rather do it face-to-face, I guess. I text, I get emails all the time from the college telling me there's things going on and that kind of stuff. But it isn't the same." Melissa talked about face-to-face communication as it compared to the discussion forums used in online classes:

I really think it's just because when you're in school and you're in a traditional environment, where you're at the class, you see the person, you're face-to-face with them, you get to know them, you converse, you talk. With [online classes], I guess, people don't really feel the need to get to know someone that they probably will never meet. You know what I'm saying? You don't see them everyday, you're not in class with them. So I don't know if that's the reason why or not...I would like to know some of the students that are in the class but I haven't and neither have they made the initiative to be like, well you know, who are you?

The students discussed how emails count in terms of making them feel more connected.

Tracy said,

Sometimes if I don't know something, I'll send out an email or a discussion and somebody will say, 'okay. Well, hey, this is how you do it'. There are people out there, students, that are looking and helping with stuff like that.

Several of them commented that they appreciated how they could email me and know that I would get right back to them. Amanda said this helped her feel connected to me and to know I was looking out for her.

We talked about the use of the discussion forum in their online classes too. Sarah commented that most of her online classes used discussion forum, explaining "if there's a question, even if we can't get an answer from our teacher, the discussion board is a big help for one another. I really like that." Sarah continued to talk about how the discussion forum could build community:

The sad part is [when the instructor doesn't answer] questions from us actually kind of makes us bond together because we all rely on one another. You really want them to

answer questions, but then on the other hand, you get to know more of your classmates when they don't.

Tracy explained how the discussion forum works in one of her classes:

We have to post our response to a question, and then next week, we have to post two responses to what somebody else says, what we think...I think that works well because we kind of have to correspond with each other that way too.

Several mentioned how group projects built connection because students were working with one another instead of on their own. Sarah said she felt the most connection with the students in her Microbiology class that she worked on labs with:

He made us come to lab a couple of times during the semester and you knew who was in your class because they were in your lab, and you had to do a group project, a group lab, so you had a lab partner to work with and you kept in contact with that person on the phone because you had to.

Sarah's comment demonstrated how group projects in many ways corresponded with face-to-face interaction. Tracy similarly explained:

So you don't really develop that relationship unless you're grouped together, like a few of us were. Then you have to correspond together, so you do build up a little relationship, but it's just not as strong as if you were in the classroom.

Melissa said the only class she had to do anything involving other students in the class was mine and that the only person she felt a connection to was Carrie "because we talked over the phone. We exchanged phone numbers and are doing a lot of the group project together over the phone."

Group work could backfire, however, as Tracy explains:

There was conflict. That's my thing. When you send out the email and say, 'this is your group,' I like getting into it. I don't like waiting days and days and days, because when something is due, we've got to get it done. We only have so long to do it and I know there could be some computer problems and stuff like that. But that's the only thing that really irks me, when somebody doesn't do what they need to do.

Second Life was also discussed as a tool for creating connection. Kwan mentioned that Second Life helped him feel really connected to the other students in the class. He said, "We can talk to each other like the real life. So even though it's an online class, still through Second Life we can talk to each other. That's the thing that I like." Melissa said one of the good things about Second Life was having set times for everyone to go in and meet up to talk and get to know each other. She said,

I did feel much more connected to [the other students] in Second Life than just speaking to them on the discussion board...I think because you're logged into this character or whatever and you see the person, they're there and you're chatting, there's actual communication back and forth, as to where a discussion board, you post something, wait for a response and then they post. You don't necessarily feel like it's a conversation.

A couple students mentioned the need for having synchronous class time. Melissa thought meeting just once a week, not necessarily in Second Life, but a time where everyone could log in at the same time and communicate would be nice. Tracy mentioned that having synchronous class time was nice, citing our times we met online during our Second Life mixers: "I think [Second Life's] pretty neat because it gets you into corresponding with each other and getting to know each other. Just because you're online doesn't mean that you can't make friends."

Amanda summed up the need for communication when asked for suggestions she had for instructors for how to connect with their students more in online classes and to connect them to college life. She said, “I guess talk to them more. Be more open. Share some personal information about yourself. I’m sure teachers want to know some stuff about the student. I guess it’s an even exchange.” While students earlier commented that their time was valuable and that being a part of the community wasn’t necessarily an important part of their educational experience, the comments reflected here seem to indicate that having some connection is beneficial. They seem to draw a distinction between communication versus building community, though part of what makes a community is the social process within it, as demonstrated in my definition of collegiate community.

Second Life and Technology Problems.

As students began enrolling in the course, I sent emails to them informing them about the Second Life requirement and asking them to check their computers for the minimum system requirements published by Second Life. Students experienced a myriad of problems with Second Life from the start though. Melissa had an IT professional at work look at her laptop after she kept getting the error message from Second Life about her computer not meeting the minimum system requirements. After assessing her computer, he said, “You have everything that you need to have. I don’t know why it keeps telling you that.” It appears that even with an updated computer that students were still experiencing technological difficulties. Several of them indicated their computers did not meet the system requirements, but decided to complete the class anyway. Tracy and Carrie, for example, kept receiving error messages about their computers not meeting the minimum system requirements.

One student, Kwan, said he had a different problem. He first said that Second Life was kind of slow on his computer, so I asked if he checked the minimum system requirements, and he told me about just getting a new laptop and assuming the system requirements were okay. He said he got an error message saying he had an Internet problem, so frequently he accessed Second Life from the Starbucks in town. Tracy had a problem downloading Second Life. She said she downloaded it but couldn't get it to come up. Then she had to download it again and join with a different name. Unfortunately, the night of one of our social mixers, her computer started experiencing more problems. I mentioned that we saw her walk into a wall and disappear during the mixer and she said,

That's when my computer when boink, right off, and so I had to power it back on, put a fan on the power cord so that it wouldn't overheat...our computer is so old, our laptop. So the power that goes into the wall overheats some times and the computer automatically shuts off.

Tracy also experienced a firewall problem, which I later found out was common on PCs. When we had social mixers scheduled, I gave students the Second Life URL to the location, but clicking on that URL, or SLurl, did not work because of the firewalls contained in PCs. Tracy said, "The SLurl would not work and then the coordinates did not work. So I just finally typed in Smithsonian and it pulled up and I clicked on it. I was like, 'Oh, my God. Now let me see if I can find them'".

Because of inadequate system requirements, Internet issues, and computer problems, most students had difficulty navigating around Second Life. Melissa mentioned she had problems maneuvering in Second Life and couldn't figure out how to move from one "world" to another when trying to complete the scavenger hunt. Sarah discussed how confused she was: "I

completely got confused in what I was doing on [the scavenger hunt] and being that I've worked with computers before, it made me so frustrated I kind of let it get the best of me." When asked what was so confusing about it, Sarah said she saw the place for the helicopter ride but couldn't figure out how to get on the helicopter. Then she also said she thought she teleported to the wrong location for one of the other scavenger hunt items. She said she was at least happy she tried it and then said, "I thought that if [Second Life] was something I had to do more often, I would get more accustomed to it." Students also mentioned being nervous or feeling weird talking to people in Second Life, wondering why you would just walk up to someone and ask what they are doing. Carrie said, "I was scared. I didn't know if I would be able to talk to anybody." Second Life also confused Amanda, especially after she accidentally stripped her avatar and couldn't figure out how to redress her character. She eventually had to Google how to dress the avatars and was able to get clothing back on her person. She said that Second Life just creeps her out, however, because the little people remind her of the Sims and she doesn't play the Sims.

Amanda wasn't the only one to compare Second Life to the video game, The Sims. Kwan said his friends kept commenting on it too by saying it looked like the Sims. He said since he had time to explore Second Life, however, he discovered it wasn't as much like the Sims as he thought because there weren't specific tasks to complete to "get ahead in life." While this comparison didn't have much to do with the educational aspects of our class, it did tie into the perspective one student had of it. Melissa said she didn't see Second Life as relevant to what she was in school for. She said, "I don't feel like it's a waste of time. I just don't feel like it was relevant to me and the job that I'm going into." Later in the interview, she gave it a little more credit, however, while still making the point that Second Life took time to learn. She said,

I don't necessarily think that Second Life is a bad thing. I feel like if I would have had more time besides with a full load, four classes, then I could have explored it more and maybe figured out some things, but I didn't have the time to put into it what it would need for you to become familiar.

She did mention the positives of Second Life being us going in to meet up and communicate though. Melissa said, "I did feel much more connected [to other students] in Second Life than just speaking to them on the discussion board [where] you post something, wait for a response and then they post." Carrie speculated that she thought Second Life would be better for different students:

For me, it was not something that I enjoyed, simply because of my age. I think the younger students in the class probably really enjoyed it; they're more computer literate, they spend tons of time on the computer, they probably really enjoyed it. I think it's a great tool for your class, in that you can talk to people from other cultures and this and that. Just for me, personally, because it was a computer thing, I just didn't feel comfortable.

Opinions about Second Life varied quite a bit, though a couple said they really enjoyed exploring Second Life. Carrie told me about "getting lost" in Second Life for a couple hours, meeting a few new people, particularly a man from Britain, who showed her around to some of his favorite places, including the Second Life version of Paris. She said she was really skeptical at first:

I mean, at first I was [untrusting]. I really was like, "Oh, this guy's probably 12 or whatever." And then I was like, "Oh, who cares." And I really did kind of get into it one

night, just because he was friendly as well. So that made it better. But that was probably my best experience with Second Life.

Tracy enjoyed the conversation the most: “I enjoyed talking with everybody, and stuff, and kind of getting a feel of people by what they were wearing or how they presented themselves in there.”

Melissa provided an alternative idea for Second Life, however: “I feel like it would have been different if it had been something where it was just the class and maybe not Second Life but just maybe a date and a time where we just met up online somehow.” Melissa’s solution about meeting up highlighted the overall view of Second Life: students thought Second Life was a useful tool for connecting with the instructor and other students, but wanted a better way to go about it because of all of the technology problems. Carrie said,

I think that I would keep it in the class. I think it’s a good tool. I really think it is. I don’t know about the younger students, what their participation in the class was. I just have a feeling that the younger students would enjoy it more than I did, and would probably get more out of it because they wouldn’t be scared to go around and do a whole bunch of things.

Kwan said students would participate more in Second Life if instructors made it more interesting and if they told the students that using Second Life was an easy way to communicate with the faculty in real time. He summed it up by saying, “people can ask you about what they’re curious about [while in Second Life] way easier than sending email, at the real time. So I think Second Life is pretty good.”

After speaking with the six students in my class and witnessing the issues they had throughout our semester, I believe the reasons for the high drop rate were primarily technical, but

also included a combination of course workload plus time needed to learn Second Life.

Comments from these six students led me to believe they like trying new things overall, but most online students aren't looking for the same experience as on-campus students. They do not expect the same connection and do not need to feel a part of the collegiate community. They take online classes primarily because they are busy adults with competing priorities and just want to get in and get out without all the fluff. Ultimately, just because I want online students to want more from their college experience does not mean they will. Online education does not need to strive to be the same as on campus education; it just needs to be a quality experience.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the collegiate community that online students experience and the possibilities relating to increased student engagement associated with augmenting student learning by using Second Life in the online classroom. This study examined how online students are engaged with their classes, their instructors, their peers, and their college, following research suggesting that educators must employ technology as a lever to promote student engagement and maximize the power of technology as a method for student success in college (Ehrmann, 2004). I used Second Life in an online class, asking students to participate in synchronous social mixers to increase interaction between students and between the students and me as the instructor. I then examined how online students view social networking and virtual worlds in their online educational experiences in terms of increasing student engagement and building a collegiate community.

I used a case study approach, consisting of teaching an online Cultural Diversity in Communication course using Second Life as an instructional tool and studying the class and its students as the case of interest. As Stake (1995) points out, it is important to understand the one case well before trying to generalize to other cases or situations, though my intention was to provide practical application for others teaching online courses. Once the course was finished, I interviewed the six remaining students about their experiences and perceptions. Interviews were the principal means of gathering data from the students, although I also collected journal entries from students throughout the semester in which they reflected on their Second Life experiences,

took notes on our class sessions, recorded emails received and sent, kept transcripts of chat logs during Second Life events, and completed member checks to clarify information gained during the interview process. Data were analyzed using a system developed by Ruona (2005) using four steps of analysis within Microsoft Office Word.

These online students indicated that they had different needs than on-campus students, primarily because they had families and jobs that competed with their roles as students. Because of their competing priorities, they did not need to be part of the larger collegiate community, even though some form of community is typically built in any course through interaction between students and instructor. Overwhelmingly, however, students felt that to be a part of the collegiate community meant having to be on campus, which they did not have time for. While being part of the collegiate community was not top on their list of priorities, students commented they still wanted to feel connected to their instructors and peers and felt this was accomplished through multiple modes of communication. Some of them commented that they would spend time in Second Life to build more connection, if they had more time. Overall, however, technology issues, along with time restraints, family commitments, etc., get in the way of pursuing the “traditional college experience”, as one student put it in her concluding interview.

In Chapter 1, I defined collegiate community as a group of people who share common educational goals or practices, are interdependent, feel a sense of belonging, and where learning takes place as a social process in a college setting. Considering this definition, there is some discord between the students’ desire to feel more connected to their instructors and peers yet not really wanting to be a part of the collegiate community. When my definition of collegiate community is considered, these students shared the goal of wanting to do well in the class. They depended on one another to do well in some instances, and therefore needed to form a

connection. Communicating in WebCT and in Second Life was a social process, and because this was part of a classroom experience, it was in a college setting. It is difficult to determine from the responses received whether or not students felt a sense of belonging, but the other components of this definition seem to be in place. Despite not having time for the collegiate community, it appears as though they are a part of it, or at least a subset of the larger community. The difficulty, however, as seen in one of the themes that emerged in my research, was that the students placed a large emphasis on the aspect of physical space being a requirement of community.

This chapter contains a discussion of the findings seen in this study, limitations of the study, and implications for future research and practice.

Discussion

Second Life left quite an impression on the students in my study. Overall, students felt it was useful in the online classroom, but they did not have the time to devote to learning how to use it properly. The use of new technology requires a high learning curve. While some people are considered “early adopters” of new technology and are more adept at learning the technology and using it effectively, it takes most people more time to learn the basics of how a new technology works and to become comfortable with using the new technology. Because this course was only eight weeks long, students did not have sufficient time to learn how to use the technology before having to use it for assignments and activities. This produced anxiety and frustration, which may explain why so many students dropped the class at the beginning of the semester.

Students also experienced many technological issues with Second Life that caused frustrations with the virtual world. My first research question, asking how Second Life could

augment online students' learning experiences in terms of building collegiate community, was answered, at least partially, based on classroom observations, document analysis, and data from interviews. Melissa mentioned, for example, that one of the good things about Second Life was having specific times that everyone could go in to Second Life to meet up and talk, so she appreciated having an extra way for everyone to communicate. She felt that having the synchronous class time added to the class so everyone could have time to get to know one another. Melissa also said, "I did feel much more connected [to other students] in Second Life than just speaking to them on the discussion board [where] you post something, wait for a response and then they post." Many of the students felt the same way. Second Life appeared to have a positive impact on building community because students could communicate in real time and represent their personalities through their avatars.

My second research question about how Second Life works in practice among online students demonstrated the challenges fully online students face with a new program, when the time they have to devote to learning that new program is limited because of their competing priorities and the high learning curve experienced with new technology, especially when that new technology is not explained in "real time." Most of the students in this study were non-traditional students who worked full or part time and who had families who took up much of their free time. These competing priorities also proved to be a challenge for working with Second Life. Also, because this was an online course, students were not able to attend an on-campus orientation to learn about how to use Second Life, which a couple students mentioned would have helped them learn the program more quickly and effectively. Introducing a real-time orientation would have diminished the effect of the high learning curve typically seen with new technologies, and may have reduced the high attrition rate witnessed with this course.

It would have been additionally beneficial to publish this course as one using Second Life in the list of class offerings so potential students would understand the requirements before enrolling in the course. Publishing the course in this way would have likely attracted more tech-savvy students who were interested in learning how to use Second Life in their classes. While having a population of students who understood technology certainly would have improved retention rates and improved on the high learning curve typically associated with learning new technologies, this different population may have changed the results I obtained from my study, since I would have focused on students who were already comfortable with new technology instead of the general population of students at the college. The technological issues students experienced may not have been as evident, diminishing my ability to offer tips for using Second Life to general education students in future online courses.

Considerations about how to improve on the attrition rate and a discussion of how this study addressed my research questions aside, three findings seem most important to mention in light of the research questions posed for this study: (a) students predominately felt connected to the collegiate community by coming to campus and, therefore, do not expect to be a part of the larger collegiate community in the online learning environment, (b) students feel connection and build community with the college, their peers, and instructors based on the efforts of the instructor, and (c) Second Life can be a useful educational tool, but there are many problems with the program suggesting our student demographic is not ready for its integration into more classes.

Finding One: Community is On Campus, Not Online.

The first finding is that to really experience the collegiate community, a student must come to campus. This finding is interwoven through all six interviews. Amanda gave the

example of instructors offering extra credit to come to campus and participate in campus events and this was the main way she connected with the college. Tracy also reflected that she had no understanding of the collegiate community until she had to come to campus for proctored exams. When I pressed Tracy about whether or not online students could get a feel of the collegiate community without ever stepping foot on campus, as mentioned above, she said she didn't think it was possible. She said,

I don't think that you would be able to get the feel of what Darton truly is – you can read it online, any mission statements they may have, or their goals and stuff like that, or you could read it in the book, but if you're strictly, strictly online and you're never able to witness the campus, you can miss out on a lot because there's a lot that goes on out here. They have a lot of stuff. They have different programs. They have after-hours stuff, the fun part, things like that that students can participate in.

To be a part of the college means to be a part of the campus community, which Wahlstedt, Pekkola, and Niemela (2008) argue can be a space and a place. The comments of the participants seem to indicate that the collegiate community can only take place on the physical place of the campus. Cohen (2007) indicated that school culture, a term frequently used in conjunction with community or climate, was present in the school life, which included care of the physical environment. The current use of social networking sites at Darton College also encouraged student participation in campus events in the physical environment. While the students recognized that the social networking sites were predominately used to get on-campus students involved with campus activities, it still sent a message that on-campus involvement was the key to being a part of the collegiate community.

The idea of asking online students to come to campus, however, goes against the purpose of online, or distance, education. Online education was primarily developed to allow students from all over the globe to take classes in any location and to complete their work when it was convenient for them. In other words, online education was supposed to help aid in flexibility of course offerings for students, which was the major advantage several of my students discussed in their interviews. Melissa, for example, commented that online classes gave her more flexibility with her competing priorities,

This is done at my convenience and it's just me and the instructor. Yes, you do still interact with your fellow students but it's not like coming to the campus and having to have a certain time that you're there. So it's just the freedom of it.

Coming to campus is not a possibility for all students then, especially those at greater distances and who have obligations away from campus life. Melissa offered a solution to this problem, however, when she stated that instructors could include live, interactive discussions and that these lectures would give students the feel of being on campus because of the increased interaction with faculty and students.

While the research discussed in the review of literature seems to point to the need for community in all educational environments, including online education, the fact is that students in this study did not expect the collegiate community to be part of their online educational experiences. Many of the courses mentioned by students had low levels of interaction because of the nature of the course. College Algebra was stated as a course where students just needed to learn the symbols and then send assignments and questions back and forth between the student and instructor. Courses like Current World Problems, American Literature, and Early Childhood Education, however, were more interactive because students were required to participate by

posting a certain number of times, consisting of quality responses to other students. For courses like this, students expected more interaction. It is during these classes that they mentioned feeling more a part of the college community, but stated that they did not expect to build community in these settings. Collegiate community, they indicated, was best experienced on campus during student activities. It appears, from these responses, that collegiate community is mainly seen in the traditional campus experience instead of in the online environment. Collegiate community in the online classroom would, therefore, be a subset of the larger community, though each online classroom would likely create its own community constructed by the instructor and students.

Finding Two: Students Feel Connection Through Efforts of the Instructor.

I think it's up to the professor, or whomever is teaching the class, to make it where you get more out of it, other than just you go, you pick up your assignment, you do what you're supposed to do and get out. I wouldn't say they're bad, I just would say they're different depending on who's teaching it...the experience you get from the class comes directly from whoever's teaching it. You can tell the ones that really care about what they're doing and about wanting you to do well, versus the ones that are there to get a paycheck. Just the act of being there every day and wanting you to succeed just helps me succeed.

This comment from one of the students in the class, Carrie, summed up how the instructor can make or break the experience for the student, a sentiment repeated throughout the course of my interviews. Research supports this too, with experienced online instructors writing about their courses and reflecting on how communication or interaction is actually the essence of the course (Draves, 2000; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). It is the instructor who determines the modes of

communication that will be used in online courses. Whether through email or discussion forum, synchronous class time in Second Life or another program like Wimba, or in group projects, the students build connections with the instructor and with their peers through these modes of communication. As Palloff and Pratt (2005) note, however,

Collaboration does not just happen. It takes planning and coordination on the part of the instructor to carry out collaborative activity successfully in an online class. Once the activity has begun, the instructor needs to stay present and involved in order to assure that students will engage with one another in a meaningful way. (p. 19-20)

Students in my class continuously commented that I was present in the class. They liked that I was in Second Life with them learning how to use it, answering questions, listening to their concerns, helping them with their group projects and finding new ways to teach about cultural diversity. Carrie provided an example of this:

I like the way that you posted the pictures of everyone, and that you invited everybody to come to Second Life, the scavenger hunts, and you were always there, and you always put yourself out there for questions or if we needed anything, you were available. I think with Second Life, when we all gathered and you kind of introduced everybody, that was real helpful I thought.

Palloff and Pratt (2003) stated, “When the instructor sets the stage appropriately, the virtual student begins to understand that his or her individual learning process depends on the participation and commitment of the other students in the group” (p. 23). Once I introduced everyone in Second Life and set up our class yearbook page in WebCT, students began talking more in the discussion forum and communicating in Second Life. That seemed to make it easier once they were assigned to groups for the final group project. Some students commented that

they liked getting to know the other students, like Tracy who said, “I enjoyed talking with everybody, and stuff, and kind of getting a feel of people by what they were wearing or how they presented themselves in [Second Life].” She said knowing them helped her rely on them during the group project.

Tracy’s comments about how knowing the students helped her rely on them during the group project ties in with research about classroom communities. Rovai (2001) stated that community depends on the setting but theorized the four components of “classroom community” as spirit (feeling of group identity), trust (feeling of safety and support), interaction (task-related and socio-emotional) and learning (the construction of shared knowledge). It seems as though several of the components of a classroom community are present based on students’ comments. If students, through their interactions on discussion boards and through the use of Second Life and other social networking sites, can interact with one another to achieve their learning goals, all while demonstrating trust with their fellow classmates and instructors and working to build a group identity in class, then the collegiate community may be prevalent in online education, even if students feel it is only experienced on campus, as discussed above.

While it is definitely possible to tie the communication and connection students experienced into a connection to a classroom and to the college, ultimately students in my study were most concerned with the connection they had with me as the instructor, or to their instructors in general. Amanda commented, “The instructors who do talk to you more and respond and are great at interaction, you tend to enjoy their classes more.” She went on to talk about how much more she got out of classes when the instructor communicated, especially by sharing personal information and letting the students in. Melissa mentioned she preferred seeing

her instructors “act real,” like admitting when they made mistakes and communicating with students in a sincere way. She said this made all the difference to her success in a class.

Finding Three: Second Life Can Be a Useful Educational Tool – In the Future.

Several students commented that they enjoyed their experiences in Second Life once they got used to it and learned to navigate it better. Tracy, for example, said,

Everybody’s personality kind of comes out in [Second Life], and the fact that you can hear them, and with the microphone and stuff you can talk to people. In discussion forums, you’re just going back and forth talking and that’s it. It’s kind of boring. Second Life was more fun because it was different. It was something you were doing. You were corresponding. It was creative. I could see myself getting more with just talking and going back and forth than [in the discussion forums].

As someone who wasn’t necessarily a fan because of her apprehension of computers and preference for having a “first life,” Carrie said,

I think that the Second Life is a valuable tool, and I would hate for you not to use it in the future...it really highlighted what we were doing. It was intercultural communication. So, it followed with the outline of the class. Again, I think for me it was the time constraints, largely, made me kind of frustrated. But, no, I think it’s a viable tool that you, hopefully, will continue to use.

Carrie’s comment about time constraints captured a major issue for some students in this study. Four of the six students had competing priorities for their time. They worked and/or had family commitments. Add these competing priorities to the fast-paced nature of the class and students commented they did not have the time necessary to devote to learning how to use Second Life. Carrie specifically commented on the time constraints posed by taking the class in

an a-term semester, or half of a full-term semester where instruction is completed in about eight weeks. She said the class was laid out very well and that things they had to do were posted well in advance, but the time constraints still posed a challenge. Sarah said,

Maybe if I was younger and didn't have children and a house and a family, maybe I would be more inclined to be involved in what goes on at school. But I have so much going on everyday...people don't have the responsibilities that I do.

Melissa made similar remarks about her time: "I feel like maybe if I hadn't had so much going on, I might have made more of an initiative to talk with other people, see what was going on and get to know some of the people, but I really didn't have time for it." She also commented that the reason she liked online classes was that she could do the work when she had the time. She stressed that this meant not including synchronous activities, such as Second Life, into the course to allow for more flexibility.

While time constraints were an issue for online students, technology issues were unfortunately the main problem for the students. Technical issues have been reported in other studies (Cheal, 2009; Edirisingha, Nie, Pluciennik, & Young, 2009; Wang & Braman, 2009; Warburton, 2009). As O'Connor and Sakshaug (2009) note, "To use SL within a course, students must also have access to a high-end computer and high-speed internet" (p. 260). As evidenced by the computer that Tracy was working with, students in the class had anything but the necessary equipment. In reference to her disappearing in an odd way in the middle of one of our Second Life social mixers, Tracy said, "Our computer is so old, our laptop. So the power that goes into the wall overheats sometimes and the computer automatically shuts off." She, and others, mentioned continuously getting an error message saying her computer didn't meet the minimum system requirements to run Second Life successfully. Research by Lester and King (2009),

which compared the work of students in a face-to-face communication course to one taught using a combination of Blackboard, a course delivery system, and Second Life, found that students in both classes criticized the format of delivery, though more in the online course had objections, which the researchers concluded was due to the technical problems with Second Life and other technology. With such a high learning curve involved with this technology, it is not surprising that students in the completely online class had more objections, since they were not afforded the same face-to-face training opportunities as those enrolled in the blended course format.

It is also not surprising that students in this course did not have access to the high-end computers recommended by O'Connor and Sakshaug (2009) and the Second Life website. The college, located in Albany, GA, serves the 20th poorest congressional district in the United States (out of 436) as of 2007-08 data (ProximityOne, n.d.). By serving a poor population, we likely have a digital divide in place. This term has taken on many different meanings, with more discussion surrounding the global divide, or the inequity of technology between industrialized and developing nations (Norris, 2001). In terms of this study, we are likely seeing a social divide, or a digital divide within our society, where technological opportunities are often unevenly distributed (Norris, 2001). This is a problem because the Internet

has become increasingly central to life, work, and play – providing job opportunities, strengthening community networks and facilitating educational advancement – it becomes even more important if certain groups and areas are systematically excluded, such as poorer neighborhoods, working-class households, or peripheral rural communities. (Norris, 2001, p. 10)

If data about our service area and the demographics of our students is accurate, these are likely the very people who do not have access to the Internet and/or have poor technological equipment

from which to access the Internet. Data from the 2004 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce indicate that 41.3% of the U.S. population does not use the Internet in any location, with many southern states having lower usage statistics. The key reasons given for not using the Internet are “Don’t Need/Not Interested” (41.6 percent), “Too Expensive” (22.9 percent), and “No or Inadequate Computer Available” (22.5 percent). The students in my class certainly seemed to fall into the last category of having inadequate computers available to them to run Second Life. While Second Life isn’t used in all classes, online students tend to have higher drop out rates, likely because of the same issues with inadequate technology or Internet access.

Putting inadequate technology aside, the findings from another study, completed by Jarmon, Traphagan, and Mayrath (2008), suggested that Second Life is effective for instructional use and increasing engagement, but all participants said they needed more training in Second Life. This finding supports early research by Gagne and Driscoll (1988), which suggested that several external learning conditions are needed to maximize the influence of engaged learning: 1) the strategy is described or demonstrated; 2) opportunities for communication about the strategy and demonstration of the strategy are provided; 3) an expectation of success is associated with incorporating the strategy and an attitude of engagement is presented; and 4) informative feedback is provided about the creativity and originality, as well as successful performance measures of engaged learners, involved in the actions of the learner. I worked to include these learning conditions for my students from the start, describing the expectations of the class, learning outcomes, and the use of Second Life, giving students the Quickstart Guide on how to use Second Life and an orientation to Second Life, describing how to sign up for an account and get started, and meeting them “in world” during our first Second Life mixer to answer questions and give them a “real time” orientation. During the mixer I talked about my

expectations for the class more thoroughly, including course policies, assignment requirements, and expectations for students to work hard on class activities, but also mentioning that we were all “in this together” and letting them know that I was collecting feedback throughout the class to determine if Second Life was working for them so I could make adjustments along the way. Students could communicate with me through email, the discussion forum, during my online office hours, by calling me, by using the online chat function, and during Second Life events. As mentioned previously, students all discussed how they appreciated how available I made myself to them throughout their learning process in Second Life.

By teaching an online course, meaning any student with the acceptable prerequisites were able to register for the course, I was not able to follow the guidelines set by Wang and Hsu (2009) to follow the ADDIE model for designing online activities for online learners, which involved assessing what the students know about technology, their personal computer capabilities, and their motivation for taking online classes or for participating in activities in Second Life, in what they term the Analysis stage. The other stages in their model are Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. This meant that I was not able to know in advance whether or not each student would experience technological difficulties or if they had the computer knowledge necessary to try a program like Second Life. As O’Connor and Sakshaug (2009) note, students are more successful in Second Life if they have some gaming experience, so being able to complete the Analysis stage, and follow through with the remaining stages, would have likely been beneficial to my students throughout the semester’s activities, though I don’t know how I would have adjusted my orientation to meet the needs of students more effectively, other than offering two sections of the class: one for more tech-savvy students and one for those who struggle with new tec. Ultimately, while several students thought I should

continue to use Second Life and commented that it was a useful tool in our class, it seems as though I need to wait a while for the technology to catch up in our area so students have the ability to use Second Life without the persistent technological problems that created so much frustration for them from the beginning of the semester.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study was in the number of students who completed the course and who were therefore interviewed. Only six students remained in my class by the end of the semester. Two-thirds of these students were non-traditional students, two-thirds were nursing or pre-nursing majors, and five-sixths were Caucasian women. A representative sample was not obtained for this study, and one reason for the low response, I believe, was the non-tech savvy student population at Darton College. Data obtained from ProximityOne (n.d.) indicates that Darton College serves the 20th poorest congressional district in the nation, and what Forbes lists as one of the poorest cities in the United States (Zumbrun, 2009, Oct. 19). Our students are at risk and underrepresented (P. Sireno, personal communication, August, 16, 2010). They have unrealistic expectations and aspirations, with many entering as pre-nursing or allied health majors without the math and science aptitude necessary to do well in these majors. They lack the academic skills necessary to do well in college and are poorly prepared, and therefore many enter needing learning support courses. They come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have an enormous dependence on financial aid, with 71% receiving federal assistance (R. Balsley, personal communication, May 3, 2010). Many are first-generation college students, so they lack the familial support necessary to do well in college. Our students come to us with low GPAs and low commitment and perseverance levels. Based on the population, students at the college likely do not have the access to technology required of certain online classes, leading them to drop

online classes quickly. They also lack the skills of knowing how to talk to faculty members about problems they may be experiencing, also leading them to drop the class.

An additional limitation was that interviews of the six participants all occurred in the span of two days. This meant that I did not take time to reflect on the interview questions and see if they could evolve to reach the information for which I was searching. Because of this, I may have missed valuable information about building the collegiate community in the online environment and the connection students felt with their peers and instructors, even though I had piloted the interview questions before using them for this population. As Ruona (2005) states,

You should not wait to begin your analysis until after all of your data have been collected. Rather, you should begin your analysis with the first interview or observation.

This will help you understand what is emerging in the data, reconstruct the data as needed, and inform your study as it progresses. (p. 237)

Though I felt I gathered data that helped me to address my research questions, taking time to rethink my interview questions and reflect on the process would have been beneficial. This limited the results of my study.

Several students commented that, if given more time, they thought they could have gotten more accustomed to Second Life and been able to complete more events and the final project “in world.” One student mentioned another limitation of the study being the length of the semester. The class occurred in an a-term semester, where instruction is completed within about eight weeks. She said if the semester had been longer than seven and a half weeks, she would have had time to become acclimated to what she had to do in the class, and therefore could have slowed down enough to learn more about Second Life, but with a full load of classes and a short semester to accomplish everything I was asking of the students, she didn’t have the time to

devote to it. She makes a good point. It takes time for students to learn what they have to do in an online class and get into the swing of things, referred to as the high learning curve previously. By adding Second Life to the course, a large challenge was placed on the shoulders of the students, causing many of them to feel overwhelmed. With so much to do in such a short amount of time, many students probably figured it wasn't worth the effort and dropped the class. Another limitation, however, is that I did not speak to those who dropped the class to determine their reasons for dropping. The reasons for students dropping the class I have reported here have been gathered from emails with some of these students before they dropped the class and based on observations from previous online courses I have taught. Those who didn't drop the class were not able to take the time to really get into Second Life, so their perceptions may have changed if given more time with the tool.

Additionally, I did not include a control group, or one receiving the same course material but in the traditional setting, by which to compare. Therefore I was not able to know whether or not the time it takes to orient students to the online class and the Second Life component took a large amount of time away from the tasks of the class and further diminished the ability to build community in the online classroom. I also did not attempt to control other important variables, such as academic ability, motivation, age, gender, and comfort with technology. Having control groups where some or all of these variables were considered would provide valuable data about student learning in the online classroom.

Implications

Student engagement research indicates that the more frequently students engage with the college and with their classes, getting involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience (Astin, 1984), the stronger the student senses support from the institution

and the higher levels of connectedness the students feel with the institution (Shin & Chan, 2004). With the benefits of student engagement widely known, it is important for institutions to examine how students can feel this connection in online education, given the boom of distance education in recent years. As mentioned in the review of literature, many components of student engagement relate to the concepts of community. Community can refer to the physical space as well as to a connection to those around us. Interaction is a large part of the last distinction of community, which is found repeatedly in the literature about student engagement.

Given the limitations of this study, further research is necessary to determine the utility of community in online education. It may be important to examine the motivations of students for taking online classes as it relates to the need for community in the online setting, as students in this study had different motivations for taking online courses than what the “traditional” student may have for participating in online education. Additionally, a more diverse group of students should be surveyed. A comparison between on-campus and fully online students should be conducted to determine perceptions of a collegiate community in the classroom setting to see what the differences are. Various institution types should also be examined to see if the lack of desire for community in the online environment is reflective only of transitory types of institutions like community colleges. Research should also be conducted which examines social networking sites more closely in terms of their utility in distance education. The examples of social networking use provided in this study indicate a connection between these sites and campus events, but research about online communities indicate that social networking sites may be more useful in distance education than currently demonstrated.

While this study focused on the community-building potential of social networking sites and on exploring how these sites can help with student engagement, another area of research to

consider is how Second Life may impact learning. I primarily used Second Life as a communication tool with my students, however exploring how students learn in this medium could be a useful area of study. With research showing that virtual worlds have potential for collaborative student work, using Second Life as a site for classroom activities, such as lectures, classroom discussions, and group projects, could help increase effectiveness of learning outcomes in the online environment.

Though future research is definitely needed a few ideas to improve practice in online classes can be gleaned from this study. First and foremost, online instructors should require participation in online discussion boards when appropriate for the subject matter. It is important that the discussion board be used for generating discussion about opinion-based course content, not for answering questions that have a set answer where only a few students will contribute anything new. Additionally, instructors should not be an overwhelming presence in the discussions, but should guide discussions subtly. Allow students to take charge of the interaction. When possible, instructors should encourage participation in campus events. Participants reported more connection with the collegiate community when being on campus, and this connection could be the difference between retaining students or not, according to the student engagement literature. While instructors should not be an overwhelming presence in the discussion forum, students want more connection with their instructors, so being fully present in the class is essential. Instructors should post replies in the discussion forum, when necessary, send email responses in a timely fashion, build relationships with their students by sharing a little about themselves (consider using a class yearbook page to aid in this process), and comment on their assignments in a personal way. Finally, students enjoy interactive learning, when appropriate for the subject, and mention wanting a method for synchronous online class time.

None of them mentioned Wimba by name, but this, along with other platforms, should be employed for use in online education as a way to help students feel more connected with the instructor and fellow classmates.

A few ideas on how to improve the use of Second Life in the classroom were mentioned in the course of this study as well. First, students suggested stressing the importance of downloading the Second Life program and getting started early. Tracy said, “Do not wait until the day of [your first Second Life event]. Once the semester starts, go ahead and get it pulled up and play with it...that way, the night of the mixer, you shouldn’t have any problems.” While I sent out emails as students registered for the class asking them to download the program and get started, it seems best to send multiple emails to request this step. Another suggestion is to provide a clear orientation for Second Life. One student, Melissa, suggested having students come to campus so someone could go over the program and help students understand it. If a course is taught online, it may not be possible to have an on-campus, or real-time, orientation to Second Life, but faculty members may want to explore developing an interactive online orientation session to help students learn about the basics of Second Life. Wang and Braman (2009) caution about letting students delve into the virtual world on their own, assuming they can master the environment on their own. Training materials and exercises need to be given careful consideration before the start of any activities in world. Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) support this step, saying that it is essential to provide explicit instructions. They provided specific instructions on how to download Second Life, how to activate voice chat, how to reach the location of any events, and provided contact details of teachers so they could be reached if a problem occurred. Along the same lines of providing an orientation to students was the suggestion that I should have surveyed students to find out how much they knew about

computers at the beginning of the semester so I could have adapted my help to those needing more assistance. This, again, goes along with following the ADDIE model set up by Wang and Hsu (2009), so I would recommend following this model when using Second Life in the classroom.

Other tips come from some of the research I completed. Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) proved to be a valuable source for teaching in Second Life. They recommend being clear about why Second Life is being used in the classroom, so instructors should complete a self-assessment about the purpose for using it. They then recommend setting clear learning objectives. They also said a big difference between being successful and not is being very familiar with Second Life before choosing to use it in the classroom. They said, “it is not currently possible to decide on a whim to teach in-world and have anything less than poor quality results” (p. 86). It is necessary to have a core set of skills/competencies about Second Life before teaching in world. O’Connor and Sakshaug (2009) said that teaching in Second Life required a serious time commitment, reflecting part of what the authors above noted. O’Connor and Sakshaug also provided other tips for teaching in Second Life:

1. Bring the course objectives and goals into Second Life: the tasks completed in Second Life should be meaningful to students and pertinent to what they are learning in the class. The authors recommend focusing on activities involving social interactions and communications and on those requiring the development and/or use of objects and links within the Second Life environment itself.
2. Create more realistic and satisfying course interactions and collaborations: give students some leeway in Second Life to plan times to meet and work on their projects.

3. Prepare students for Second Life and accommodate constraints: give some overview startup materials and require an initial informal meeting in Second Life during the first week of the course to get students comfortable with this environment. Call students to help with technology problems and give students alternative modes of access if they have difficulties with Second Life, such as using a conference call to hear what is going on in world.
4. Prepare for uncertainty: the educator has to understand that teaching in Second life includes uncertainty, ambiguity, frustration, and change in design, planning and implementation of a course. Instructors have to be willing to go with the flow and be an adventurer while teaching in Second Life.

This last point is perhaps most noteworthy because it requires flexibility on the part of the faculty member. Kluge and Riley (2008) make the argument, however, that instructors have done well adapting to new technologies over the years. Technology, such as digital projectors, the Internet, PowerPoint and Learning Management Systems, presented their own set of challenges to educators and we've been able to adapt fairly well. The question, however, is whether or not instructors can adapt their teaching to meet the new challenges of virtual worlds. It is not enough to move written lecture notes or PowerPoint slides to billboards in the virtual world. Instructors will have to rethink their approaches to teaching entirely so they can create positive, worthwhile learning experiences for their students.

Given the tips for effective practices in online education and for use of Second Life in the classroom, there are some important policy implications to consider. Institutions involved with online education, and specifically programs requiring advanced technology such as Second Life, should provide access to the required technology to help students be more successful in their

courses. Additionally, institutions should examine academic programs and/or courses to determine which are more collaborative in nature, or those requiring more interaction between students and students and the instructor, and then encourage use of Second Life or other technologies, which have shown positive outcomes in terms of collaborative outcomes and community building, by instructors teaching in these programs or these classes. Institutions should provide instruction on the effective use of these technologies to their faculty before inclusion of these technologies in the classroom setting to improve learning outcomes and other student success factors.

To improve student success in online courses and help determine where students will best be suited based on their skill set, institutions should consider implementing an assessment of students' level of readiness to study online as a prerequisite before students are able to enroll in online courses. This assessment should measure individual skills, such as motivation and procrastination, learning styles, technical competency, on-screen reading speed and comprehension, typing speed and accuracy, and life factors. One such assessment is the Readiness for Education at a Distance Indicator (READI), which takes 30 to 45 minutes for students to complete and provides students with a detailed report of their projected capabilities in online courses. To make this assessment more useful for institutions, students should receive a rating on a readiness scale, with individual scores in each subsection. Institutions should set prerequisite readiness scores for each online class, which can be based on the total readiness rating or based on individual subsection scores to fulfill requirements of individual courses. Students must have a score that meets or exceeds this readiness score in order to enroll in the online course. For online courses with special technological requirements, such as the one used in this study, a different prerequisite readiness score should be set, especially in the subsection

relating to technical competency. This assessment will help provide the basic assessment steps recommended by Wang and Hsu (2009), allowing for greater levels of student success in online courses.

Conclusion

I started this research with both the mindset that online education was inferior to traditional, on-campus education and with the intention of determining how online education could be improved. While many areas of research are left to explore in online education, it is important to note that education in general can always be improved. When examining National Survey of Student Engagement data, particularly that for community colleges, which is my area of interest, we see that students are not engaging in sufficient critical thinking activities, for example. This problem occurs regardless of the course delivery medium. Given my research and the literature presented in Chapter 2, I believe this disconnect for community college students comes from these institutions providing instruction to a commuter student population. Students are therefore not participating in the collegiate community nor becoming engaged both in and out of the classroom. When you add the increasing number of online classes to the mix, community college students face additional challenges because the connection they may have had with students in the traditional classroom and from socializing before and after class is lost. Students are not able to participate in discussions or socialize with their peers outside of the classroom, or engage in intellectual debates in the physical spaces around campus, where exchanges of ideas are common on college campuses. Additionally, students are not getting involved in extracurricular activities that help in their academic and social development.

As Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement notes, students learn more when they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. To be involved,

students must devote energy to academics, spend much time on campus, participate in student organizations and other activities, and interact with faculty (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Students must definitely take an active role in pursuing these opportunities, as noted by Pace (1982), whose research indicated the most influential variable for student achievement is the quality of effort students themselves invest in using the facilities and opportunities for learning and development that exist in the college setting (p. 19). Pace's conclusion highlights these points well: "college can't give you an education; but if you go to college, and fully use the facilities and opportunities it provides, you can get an education—indeed, a very good one" (1982, p. 36). Institutions can also subscribe to this mindset and continue to explore opportunities for involvement and engagement for traditional and online students. This pursuit is something to which all educators must commit, through continued professional development, an exchange of pedagogical ideas between faculty, and a commitment to never settling for the status quo, in order to help provide a very good education to our students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Guide/Protocol

1. Introduction of project
 - a. Consent form
 - b. Request permission to tape
 - c. Provide opportunity for questions about study, interview and process
2. Demographics
 - a. Gender
 - b. Age
 - c. Student status: full-time, part-time
 - d. Number of online classes taken
3. Previous experiences
 - a. What online classes have you taken?
 - b. What led you to take these classes online?
 - c. Tell me about your experiences in these classes.
4. Connection
 - a. How connected did you feel to your instructors? To your peers?
 - b. What, if anything, did your instructors do to build community within your classes?
 - c. What did you enjoy about these methods? What didn't you enjoy?

5. Culture

- a. Describe your college's culture, including such things as values, beliefs, norms, stories, traditions, symbols, etc.
- b. How have you experienced this culture while taking classes online?
- c. Who communicated the college culture to you?
- d. What did they communicate to you? How did they share the culture with you?
What parts of the culture of your college have been included in your classes and in the online services you've received?
- e. What could members of your college do to help you feel a part of the college culture?
 - i. What suggestions do you have for your instructors about how to connect online students to the college culture/college life?
 - ii. Suggestions for staff?
 - iii. Suggestions for administrators?
 - iv. Who else could help you feel a part of the college culture? How can they help?
- f. How might being a part of the college culture during your online coursework help you? How might it hurt you?
- g. What do you expect from your college in terms of creating an online culture?

6. Social networking sites

- a. Tell me about your experiences in Second Life during this class.
- b. How connected did you feel to your instructor within Second Life? To your peers?

- c. What did you enjoy about the activities and/or assignments in Second Life?
 - d. What didn't you enjoy about the activities and/or assignments in Second Life?
 - e. What was the culture of the class within Second Life? How did you come to understand this culture?
 - f. How might social networking sites (such as MySpace, Facebook, Second Life, etc.) help you feel connected to your peers, instructors and the college community? Explain.
7. Concluding questions
- a. Based on your experience in this course and other online courses, what do you think your college can do to improve online education?
 - b. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your online experiences?

Appendix B – Coding Scheme

The following is the coding scheme used in the analysis of the data surveying online students about how, if at all, they feel a part of the collegiate culture of an institution if they are not on campus. The codes provided are the ones needed to understand the coding of Interviewee #1 in Appendix C: Analyzed & Coded Interview.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 10000 Students | 12000 Connection |
| 10100 Demographics | 12100 Methods to build connection |
| 10200 Prior experiences | 12110 Enjoyment of |
| 10210 Online courses taken | 12120 Non-enjoyment of |
| 10220 Instructor methods | 12200 Members |
| 10221 Discussion boards | 12210 With instructors |
| 10222 Group projects | 12220 With peers |
| 10223 On-campus work | |
| 10224 Email | 13000 Social Networking Sites |
| 10300 Priorities | 13100 Second Life |
| 10400 Needs | 13110 Barriers |
| | 13111 Computer problems |
| 11000 Culture | 13112 Navigation problems |
| 11100 Definition | 13113 Assignment problems |
| 11200 How it is experienced | 13114 Lack of computer skills |
| 11300 Source | 13115 Don't like computer games |
| 11310 Instructors | 13116 Did not see relevance |
| 11320 Students | 13120 Uses |
| 11330 Campus | 13130 Connection |
| 11400 Utility | 13131 With instructor |
| 11410 Helpful | 13132 With peers |
| 11420 Hurtful | 13140 Culture of class in Second Life |
| 11500 Expectations | |
| | 14000 Suggestions |

Appendix C – Analyzed and Coded Interview

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	AE01	1	1	<i>So I'm joined by [Sarah], and I know I just asked this question, but I have to ask it again for the purposes of the recording. So [Sarah], now that we've talked about the consent form, do you have any questions about the study, the interview or this entire process?</i>	
	SF01	1	2	No, I don't.	
	AE01	2b	3	<i>So let's start off with some demographics. Could you tell me how old you are?</i>	
10100	SF01	2b	4	I am 33.	
	AE01	2c	5	<i>And are you a full-time or part-time student?</i>	
10100	SF01	2c	6	I'm a full-time student.	
	AE01	2	7	<i>Are you just taking classes at Darton?</i>	
10100	SF01	2	8	Yes.	
	AE01	2	9	<i>Are you working on a degree on line?</i>	
10100	SF01	2	10	I am. I'm working towards my nursing, trying to get all of my basic classes before I start my nursing course.	A lot of nursing majors in my class!
	AE01	2	11	<i>Oh, okay. And when should you start your nursing program?</i>	
10100	SF01	2	12	I was hoping to get this quarter, but I guess I didn't get my – so I'm going to say next semester. I'm going to say probably summer semester.	
	AE01	2	13	<i>Well, good luck with that. I'm sure you're a little anxious.</i>	
	SF01	2	14	I am. I'm excited and I'm anxious because I'm at the end of my core classes.	
	AE01	2	15	<i>Then what are you going to do during the spring semester?</i>	
	SF01	2	16	Well, I have one more that I have to take. It's really just one class. So I'm going to take it and I don't know what else. I'll try to find me some other classes to take.	
	AE01	2	17	<i>So it's going to be filler classes, nothing that you really need.</i>	
	SF01	2	18	Exactly.	
	AE01	2d	19	<i>Oh, good. Those are always fun. So how many on line classes have you taken?</i>	
10200	SF01	2d	20	Wow. I guess nine or ten. I have four this semester and I took three the last semester, and three, so that's ten. Yeah, ten.	
	AE01	3a	21	<i>Which classes have you taken on line?</i>	
10210	SF01	3a	22	I've taken History. I've taken Human Anatomy I and II, Microbiology, a computer class this semester. I've taken PE on-line and History, and then this class. That's all I can think of this second.	Just like Public Speaking, I find it interesting what can be taught online.
	AE01	3a	23	<i>No problem. That's actually a pretty wide range of courses there.</i>	
10210	SF01	3a	24	Uhm hm. It is. I already had English 101 when I went to college before, so I had to take 102. Oh, and I took a Regents test. It was like an introduction to the Regents.	
	AE01	3a	25	<i>Oh, sure.</i>	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
10210	SF01	3a	26	It wasn't a whole semester. It was kind of preparing you for the test.	
	AE01	3a	27	<i>The workshop that was kind of teaching you about it?</i>	
	SF01	3a	28	Right.	
10300	AE01	3b	29	<i>Now you said part of the reason you're taking on line classes is because you live a ways away.</i>	
10300	SF01	3b	30	That and trying to raise a family.	
	AE01	3b	31	<i>Sure. What are you going to do once you have to be on campus?</i>	
10300	SF01	3b	32	When I have to do that, my mom is retired, so she'll be a big help to me because she also went to Darton for nursing a long time ago when her and my dad were raising us as a family. So he was her support system. And by them, we'll have to figure it out. But I don't work now, so that will sure be a help, not trying to juggle school, a family and work.	
	AE01	3b	33	<i>That's true. That definitely eliminates one major stressor.</i>	
	SF01	3b	34	Uhm hm. I've been blessed in that department.	
	AE01	3b	35	<i>I hope that really works out for you.</i>	
	SF01	3b	36	Me, too.	
	AE01	3c	37	<i>I'll bet. Well can you tell me a little bit about some of the experiences you've had in some of these on-line classes.</i>	
10200	SF01	3c	38	Being that I've been to college before and went and sat as a traditional student in a class, the one this is you – it was an experience, when I first learned. It was kind of scary at first to know that you are responsible to read all the lectures. You don't hear a teacher lecture. You have to read their notes, or their lecture notes that they put on a board. In a class, a lot of them will tell you, even when they're lecturing, "You might want to remember this point", and you knew to circle or whatever you had to do, because it was more than likely a test question.	
10200	SF01	3c	39	Being on line, you don't have that luxury. Even if they give you a lecture that you listen to, sometimes you can ask a question, and these are recorded questions. You have to contact them and it might take a couple of days. I know in one of my classes, the first test we took, we still don't have the result back.	Also coded as 12210 – Connection, Members, With instructors; What sad commentary that she still hadn't heard back about her first test as of over halfway through the mid point in the semester!

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
12210	SF01	3c	40	Being on line, you don't have that luxury. Even if they give you a lecture that you listen to, sometimes you can ask a question, and these are recorded questions. You have to contact them and it might take a couple of days. I know in one of my classes, the first test we took, we still don't have the result back.	Also coded as 10200 – Students, Prior experiences; What sad commentary that she still hadn't heard back about her first test as of over halfway through the mid point in the semester!
	AE01	3c	41	<i>Oh, really?</i>	
10210	SF01	3c	42	Yes, and we took two tests in there. Basically, it's my Micro class and we go to lab and lab, it's all lab. You don't have time to really talk about your test or anything much. So it's a challenge because you email that professor and he's yet to answer any of my emails. So it's kind of like you wonder if he's getting it, whereas you go to a class and you –	How do professors like this continue to teach if they don't stay in contact?
10220	SF01	3c	43	I think you get more from a class because you have one-on-one with a professor, you can stay after class and talk to them.	Also coded as 12210 – Connection, Members, With instructors
12210	SF01	3c	44	I think you get more from a class because you have one-on-one with a professor, you can stay after class and talk to them.	Also coded as 10220 – Students, Prior experiences, instructor methods
10300	SF01	3c	45	Of course, you can do that, but if you live a ways away, you're going to have to make a special trip to go.	This is difficult if online students live in different states or countries though!
10200	SF01	3c	46	But then on the other hand, I, myself, have been able to read these lectures, read the notes, but I still feel like I'm getting it because I can call them up myself. I guess this time around – I was younger when I went to college. You go to college and you think the teacher is out to get you. Now I realize, all these years later, you're here to help us. You're not here to hurt us. And if you have a question, just ask.	Also coded as 10400 – Students, Needs; I wonder how the perception of the teacher being out to get the student started
10400	SF01	3c	47	But then on the other hand, I, myself, have been able to read these lectures, read the notes, but I still feel like I'm getting it because I can call them up myself. I guess this time around – I was younger when I went to college. You go to college and you think the teacher is out to get you. Now I realize, all these years later, you're here to help us. You're not here to hurt us. And if you have a question, just ask.	Also coded as 10200 – Students, Prior experiences; I wonder how the perception of the teacher being out to get the student started
	AE01	3c	48	<i>That's so true.</i>	
10200	SF01	3c	49	I've learned all these years later that it's totally the opposite. They're here to help you succeed, not help you. So it's been an experience. But I've really, really enjoyed my on line classes.	
	AE01	3c	50	<i>That's good. Does it matter what instructor you're taking the class from?</i>	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
10200	SF01	3c	51	No, it hasn't. In my Anatomy classes, I had a choice, but I stuck with the same one I had for the first one because I really liked her. She was very, very helpful. And she was not a professor that taught on campus anymore. She only did on line classes, so she knew what we were dealing with. I really enjoyed her a lot.	
	AE01	3c	52	<i>That's wonderful. I think I actually know who you're talking about, and from what I've heard, she's done really wonderful things with this courses.</i>	
	SF01	3c	53	Uhm hm. I like her.	
	AE01	4a	54	<i>I'm glad you enjoyed it. So how connected did you feel to your instructors in your on line classes?</i>	
12210	SF01	4a	55	Well, for instance, in your class, you always get back to us right away. You really were connected with our class, and that is a big help to anybody because some of them don't. I guess it just depends on the class. Some of them were really helpful and some of them were kind of "Here's the information and just sink or swim". I did feel like that. But then you feel like that even if you go to – some professors are like that, period. Even if you go to class, it's like that.	Also coded as 10220 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods; and 12110 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Enjoyment of; Importance of the quick reply!
10220	SF01	4a	56	Well, for instance, in your class, you always get back to us right away. You really were connected with our class, and that is a big help to anybody because some of them don't. I guess it just depends on the class. Some of them were really helpful and some of them were kind of "Here's the information and just sink or swim". I did feel like that. But then you feel like that even if you go to – some professors are like that, period. Even if you go to class, it's like that.	Also coded as 12210 – Connection, Members, With instructors; and 12110 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Enjoyment of; Importance of the quick reply!
12110	SF01	4a	57	Well, for instance, in your class, you always get back to us right away. You really were connected with our class, and that is a big help to anybody because some of them don't. I guess it just depends on the class. Some of them were really helpful and some of them were kind of "Here's the information and just sink or swim". I did feel like that. But then you feel like that even if you go to – some professors are like that, period. Even if you go to class, it's like that.	Also coded as 12210 – Connection, Members, With instructors; and 10220 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods; Importance of the quick reply!
	AE01	4	58	<i>Well, what methods did you use to keep in contact with your instructors?</i>	
10221	SF01	4	59	Email, discussion boards. If it was really dire, I would call, but so many people, it's hard to get through to them. Really, it's better to email people nowadays than it is any other way. That's really kind of sad, but that's kind of the way our world has turned to.	Also coded as 10224 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Email; Why don't instructors respond?

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
10224	SF01	4	60	Email, discussion boards. If it was really dire, I would call, but so many people, it's hard to get through to them. Really, it's better to email people nowadays than it is any other way. That's really kind of sad, but that's kind of the way our world has turned to.	Also coded as 10221 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Discussion boards; Why don't instructors respond?
	AE01	4	61	<i>Yeah. Doesn't that make you wonder if we're going to know how to communicate in person one of these –</i>	
	SF01	4	62	It does. It really does.	
	AE01	4	63	<i>I'm happy to know that I was able to answer emails and any concerns you had in a timely manner. That makes me feel good as an instructor, so thank you.</i>	
12210	SF01	4	64	Oh, you were. You did. And I noticed that with not just even myself. I would see things people would post and right away you would get back to them.	Quick replies are noticed
	AE01	4	65	<i>Well, we try the best we can, and definitely, there's a difference between the instructors that you're going to take. But I kind of figure if I'm teaching a Communication class, I better be communicating with you guys.</i>	
	SF01	4	66	Exactly.	
	AE01	4a	67	<i>What about the connection you felt with your peers? Have you been able to get to know any of the other students in your on line classes?</i>	
12000	SF01	4a	68	Not as well as I would in a class. That's another example. The only one, I guess, really – even though we had an opportunity to chat on line in our class,	Not as much connection online as in an on-campus class
10223	SF01	4a	69	the only class I felt a lot of connection and talking to was my Micro class, simply because he made us come to lab a couple of times during the semester and you knew who was in your class because they were in your lab, and you had to do a group project, a group lab, so you had a lab partner to work with and you kept in contact with that person on the phone because you had to.	Also coded as 10222 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Group projects
10222	SF01	4a	70	the only class I felt a lot of connection and talking to was my Micro class, simply because he made us come to lab a couple of times during the semester and you knew who was in your class because they were in your lab, and you had to do a group project, a group lab, so you had a lab partner to work with and you kept in contact with that person on the phone because you had to.	Also coded as 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, On-campus work
10222	SF01	4a	71	Even in your class, we had a group, but we only talked a couple of times, and that's it.	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
12000	SF01	4a	72	The biggest thing was seeing. When you put the pictures of us on there, that was like, “wow”. Trying to put a voice – because I had a pen-pal in school and I never – until we sent pictures. Then you realized who the person was. And it’s just putting that all together. So those are the only two classes that I really felt any connection to anybody that I was in class with. Other than that, you don’t, and that’s kind of sad. Then again, you have to look at the long term here. Why are you going to school?	Also coded as 10400 – Students, Needs; Great example of how the class yearbook page can make a difference to these students; Seems the student is nostalgic for the missing connection
10400	SF01	4a	73	The biggest thing was seeing. When you put the pictures of us on there, that was like, “wow”. Trying to put a voice – because I had a pen-pal in school and I never – until we sent pictures. Then you realized who the person was. And it’s just putting that all together. So those are the only two classes that I really felt any connection to anybody that I was in class with. Other than that, you don’t, and that’s kind of sad. Then again, you have to look at the long term here. Why are you going to school?	Also coded as 12000 – Connection; Great example of how the class yearbook page can make a difference to these students; Seems the student is nostalgic for the missing connection
	AE01	4	74	<i>You mentioned that was part of the downfall of on line education. What do you think not having that connection takes away from your on line class?</i>	
12120	SF01	4	75	In a way, it’s sad that you go through such a major point of your life going back to school. You share those experiences with the people that you go to school with. So many people are in my same boat, or there’s others. That’s the only thing, I guess.	Also coded as 12220 – Connection, Members, With peers; Shared experience isn’t really shared
12220	SF01	4	76	In a way, it’s sad that you go through such a major point of your life going back to school. You share those experiences with the people that you go to school with. So many people are in my same boat, or there’s others. That’s the only thing, I guess.	Also coded as 12120 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Non-enjoyment of; Shared experience isn’t really shared
	AE01	4	77	<i>Are you basically saying it’s nice to have someone who will kind of pull you along?</i>	
12220	SF01	4	78	Yes, it is, or you can have a study group with.	
	AE01	4	79	<i>Sure. That way you can benefit from other people’s perspectives and learn from each other.</i>	
12000	SF01	4	80	Right. My mom didn’t have this luxury of on line classes, and she had to go to class. Those ladies that went through the Nursing experience with her, they did study groups all the time over there at Darton, and many of them, they ended up graduating together, and even working together, and someone along the way had even worked at the same place. So they kind of kept contact all through school, whereas those people that I’m going through this stuff with, if we walked into the same room, we wouldn’t have that same connection.	Cohorts make a difference. Students now miss this same connection.

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	AE01	4b	81	<i>How many of your classes use the discussion forum as a way to try to get that interaction going?</i>	
10221	SF01	4b	82	Mostly all of them. There's a few that don't. My computer class, we don't. But just about everybody else, we do. If there's a question, even if we can't get an answer from our teacher, the discussion boards, it's a big help for one another. I really like that.	Also coded as 12110 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Enjoyment of; and 12220 – Connection, Members, With peers; Some discussion boards create a bond/help each other out
12110	SF01	4b	83	Mostly all of them. There's a few that don't. My computer class, we don't. But just about everybody else, we do. If there's a question, even if we can't get an answer from our teacher, the discussion boards, it's a big help for one another. I really like that.	Also coded as 10221 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Discussion boards; and 12220 – Connection, Members, With peers; Some discussion boards create a bond/help each other out
12220	SF01	4b	84	Mostly all of them. There's a few that don't. My computer class, we don't. But just about everybody else, we do. If there's a question, even if we can't get an answer from our teacher, the discussion boards, it's a big help for one another. I really like that.	Also coded as 10221 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Discussion boards; and 12110 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Enjoyment of; Some discussion boards create a bond/help each other out
	AE01	4b	85	<i>Oh, good. I think that's the big reason the discussion board is set up that way. It's good to bounce those ideas off of one another.</i>	
	SF01	4b	86	It really is.	
	AE01	4b	87	<i>So what have your on line instructors done, if anything, to build on line community in your class?</i>	
10220	SF01	4b	88	Just probably the ones that require us to communicate with one another, and then again, the sad part is not answering questions from us actually kind of makes us bond together because we all rely on one another. You kind of get that they've – you really want them to answer questions, but then on the other hand, you get to know more of your classmates when they don't.	Also coded as 12220 – Connection, Members, With peers; Interesting! An absent professor can actually bond the group.

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
12220	SF01	4b	89	Just probably the ones that require us to communicate with one another, and then again, the sad part is not answering questions from us actually kind of makes us bond together because we all rely on one another. You kind of get that they've – you really want them to answer questions, but then on the other hand, you get to know more of your classmates when they don't.	Also coded as Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods; Interesting! An absent professor can actually bond the group.
	AE01	4c	90	<i>Sure. So what have you enjoyed about these methods, and on the flip side, what haven't you enjoyed?</i>	
12110	SF01	4c	91	I have enjoyed, with these methods, I guess, not having to go sit in class. When I'm at home with the kids or whatever, even during the summer, I can go at night to study or before they wake up, instead of having to be in class.	Also coded as 10300 – Students, Priorities
10300	SF01	4c	92	I have enjoyed, with these methods, I guess, not having to go sit in class. When I'm at home with the kids or whatever, even during the summer, I can go at night to study or before they wake up, instead of having to be in class.	Also coded as 12110 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Enjoyment of
12120	SF01	4c	93	And not enjoying, I guess it's being with the other people, helping that support system. That's probably the biggest downfall for me is the support system that you miss out.	Also coded as 12220 – Connection, Members, With peers;
12220	SF01	4c	94	And not enjoying, I guess it's being with the other people, helping that support system. That's probably the biggest downfall for me is the support system that you miss out.	Also coded as 12120 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Non-enjoyment of
10400	SF01	4c	95	But I feel like the luxury of I can study when I want to study or I can come to the computer and do my classes in my pajamas. I don't have to get dressed and go to class and things like that. That's the only good thing.	Also coded as 12110 – Connection, Methods to build connection, Enjoyment of
12110	SF01	4c	96	But I feel like the luxury of I can study when I want to study or I can come to the computer and do my classes in my pajamas. I don't have to get dressed and go to class and things like that. That's the only good thing.	Also coded as 10400 – Students, Needs
	AE01		97	<i>Have you seen some of the students that come to class? I mean, I've seen them come in pajamas.</i>	
	SF01		98	I know. I did go to school, but I'm from the south and I'm from that old southern charm home where you don't leave home like that.	
	AE01		99	<i>Sure. I understand.</i>	
	SF01		100	My mom and dad, I don't care, even if I was 54. They'd be, "You're not leaving the house like that, are you?"	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	AE01		101	<i>My parents would probably say the same thing, but my sister and I did it all the time. I'd like to change gears just a little bit and move on to talking about culture. So obviously we've just completed this cultural diversity class. So I'm just going to remind you of the definition of culture we used in that class and then I'm going to ask you some questions. And don't worry. It's not a quiz.</i>	
	SF01		102	Right.	
	AE01	5a	103	<i>So the definition we were using in class of culture is that culture refers to the relatively specialized lifestyle shared and learned by a group of people, and that can consist of shared language, rules, traditions, customs, beliefs and values. And then I gave you a couple of examples that could qualify, like family or friends, schools, organizations, clubs, regions, and nationalities. So given that – that's just my brief synopsis of our entire semester – could you describe for me what our college's culture is?</i>	
	SF01	5a	104	Our culture?	
	AE01	5a	105	<i>Yeah. The culture of Darton College.</i>	
	SF01	5a	106	Is this a trick thing?	
	AE01	5a	107	<i>It is a little tricky, but just do your best.</i>	
11100	SF01	5a	108	I guess the culture at our college is – we may not all have the necessarily the same – we're not all there for the same education, the same reason, but we all are there for the same purpose, the same reason. We're all there to work towards a similar goal. We're all – to me, with a culture, you're all about the same beliefs, and that's basically what we are. We're all there with the same beliefs. We're there to get an education. We're there to make something of our lives and we all communicate basically – if not altogether, we all do communicate within a group in the same culture. That's kind of what I guess I would more say about the college.	Is it that our college doesn't have a defined culture or just that students don't notice it, examine it, think about it, etc.?
	AE01	5a	109	<i>And how do you think Darton's culture is different from any other college's culture?</i>	
11100	SF01	5a	110	It's not, but then it is because – so it's kind of a double-edged – it is because everybody at all of the colleges are there for the same reason. But I guess at Darton, it's smaller. It's a little more close knit, whereas, say, you went to Athens, they're all there for the same purpose but you could meet 100 people in a day and then the next day meet a total other different 100 people. At Darton, there's a lot of people there, but on campus, you kind of pass the same people over and over. You are there the same, but then again, it's different with being a smaller group of people. It's kind of confusing but –	Also coded as 11200 – Culture, How it is experienced; Our culture is defined as educationally close knit? Hmm.

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
11200	SF01	5a	111	It's not, but then it is because – so it's kind of a double-edged – it is because everybody at all of the colleges are there for the same reason. But I guess at Darton, it's smaller. It's a little more close knit, whereas, say, you went to Athens, they're all there for the same purpose but you could meet 100 people in a day and then the next day meet a total other different 100 people. At Darton, there's a lot of people there, but on campus, you kind of pass the same people over and over. You are there the same, but then again, it's different with being a smaller group of people. It's kind of confusing but –	Also coded as 11100 – Culture, Definition; Our culture is defined as educationally close knit? Hmm.
	AE01	5b	112	<i>No. That works just fine. Thank you. How have you experienced this culture while taking your on line classes?</i>	
11200	SF01	5b	113	The way I've experienced that culture is on line with the people who I converse with on line and on our community boards, and the times that I've gone to lab. I've gotten to experience that with the people that are going to school there. That would probably be the best way I could say I did it with on line classes.	The people make/define the culture. Also coded as 10221 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Discussion boards; 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, On-campus work; 11320 – Culture, Source, Students; and 11330 – Culture, Source, Campus
10221	SF01	5b	114	The way I've experienced that culture is on line with the people who I converse with on line and on our community boards, and the times that I've gone to lab. I've gotten to experience that with the people that are going to school there. That would probably be the best way I could say I did it with on line classes.	The people make/define the culture. Also coded as 11200 – Culture, How it is experienced; 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, On-campus work; 11320 – Culture, Source, Students; and 11330 – Culture, Source, Campus

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
10223	SF01	5b	115	The way I've experienced that culture is on line with the people who I converse with on line and on our community boards, and the times that I've gone to lab. I've gotten to experience that with the people that are going to school there. That would probably be the best way I could say I did it with on line classes.	The people make/define the culture. Also coded as 11200 – Culture, How it is experienced; 10221 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Discussion boards; 11320 – Culture, Source, Students; and 11330 – Culture, Source, Campus
11320	SF01	5b	116	The way I've experienced that culture is on line with the people who I converse with on line and on our community boards, and the times that I've gone to lab. I've gotten to experience that with the people that are going to school there. That would probably be the best way I could say I did it with on line classes.	The people make/define the culture. Also coded as 11200 – Culture, How it is experienced; 10221 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Discussion boards; 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, On-campus work; and 11330 – Culture, Source, Campus
11330	SF01	5b	117	The way I've experienced that culture is on line with the people who I converse with on line and on our community boards, and the times that I've gone to lab. I've gotten to experience that with the people that are going to school there. That would probably be the best way I could say I did it with on line classes.	The people make/define the culture. Also coded as 11200 – Culture, How it is experienced; 10221 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, Discussion boards; 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, Instructor methods, On-campus work; and 11320 – Culture, Source, Students
	AE01	5c	118	<i>So you've provided me this kind of definition of Darton's culture and just how it fits into college, in general. Who communicated this culture to you? How did you learn about this?</i>	
11310	SF01	5c	119	I guess that I never really paid attention to it more so than in your class. But I've kind of made myself notice more things being in your class than ever before.	Good advertisement for the purpose of a cultural diversity class :)
	AE01	5c	120	<i>Well, I guess a cultural diversity class would definitely raise your awareness.</i>	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	SF01	5c	121	It would. Yeah. It makes you kind of look around at other people a little more.	
	AE01	5	122	<i>That's for sure. Well, now I feel like I'm just going to be asking about myself. So try not to think of me as the instructor, or something.</i>	
	SF01	5	123	Are you sure this isn't a quiz?	
	AE01	5	124	<i>I'm positive it's not.</i>	
	SF01	5	125	If it is, how many brownie points can I get if this is about you.	
	AE01	5d	126	<i>Well, you just said who communicated this to you, and you just said, "Until your class, no one". So my next question is what did they communicate to you, which is why I said, of course, it seems like I'm referring to myself.</i>	
11100	SF01	5d	127	That's right. Well, you explained to us what a culture was and the different types of culture. Of course, everybody knows that we have different cultures. The person living on the next street from me could be a different person than we have in our family. But I guess I never really paid attention to the people around me or their customs or their cultures until your class, and it makes you aware that they do things similar to me or different to me than my family may do. So I guess that would really be the thing about it.	Also coded as 11310 – Culture, Source, Instructors
11310	SF01	5d	128	That's right. Well, you explained to us what a culture was and the different types of culture. Of course, everybody knows that we have different cultures. The person living on the next street from me could be a different person than we have in our family. But I guess I never really paid attention to the people around me or their customs or their cultures until your class, and it makes you aware that they do things similar to me or different to me than my family may do. So I guess that would really be the thing about it.	Also coded as 11100 – Culture, Definition
	AE01	5d	129	<i>That's definitely a good awareness to have because I suppose most of us don't think of our neighbor as being of a different culture.</i>	
	SF01	5d	130	Uhm hm. Right.	
	AE01	5d	131	<i>As was in all our material and some of our discussions, so many of us look at culture as just our nationality and our race.</i>	
	SF01	5d	132	It is not.	
	AE01	5e	133	<i>Those aren't necessarily the same things. So what could members of the college do to make you feel part of the culture here?</i>	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
11330	SF01	5e	134	Well, I know they have special programs that they do for the student; the actual school and some of the groups do. They do all they can to make sure to let everyone know they have programs and things for any of the students, on line or on campus. It's really up to, more or less, the student to take the initiative to be part of that. I, personally, have my own life going on and I don't take part of that. I can't really say it's anybody's fault than my own, probably. But that goes back to the point of life.	Students get what they want to out of the college experience. Also coded as 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, instructor methods, on-campus work; 11320 – Culture, Source, Students; and 11500 – Culture, Expectations
10223	SF01	5e	135	Well, I know they have special programs that they do for the student; the actual school and some of the groups do. They do all they can to make sure to let everyone know they have programs and things for any of the students, on line or on campus. It's really up to, more or less, the student to take the initiative to be part of that. I, personally, have my own life going on and I don't take part of that. I can't really say it's anybody's fault than my own, probably. But that goes back to the point of life.	Students get what they want to out of the college experience. Also coded as 11330 – Culture – Source, Campus; 11320 – Culture, Source, Students; and 11500 – Culture, Expectations
11320	SF01	5e	136	Well, I know they have special programs that they do for the student; the actual school and some of the groups do. They do all they can to make sure to let everyone know they have programs and things for any of the students, on line or on campus. It's really up to, more or less, the student to take the initiative to be part of that. I, personally, have my own life going on and I don't take part of that. I can't really say it's anybody's fault than my own, probably. But that goes back to the point of life.	Students get what they want to out of the college experience. Also coded as 11330 – Culture – Source, Campus; 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, instructor methods, on-campus work; and 11500 – Culture, Expectations
11500	SF01	5e	137	Well, I know they have special programs that they do for the student; the actual school and some of the groups do. They do all they can to make sure to let everyone know they have programs and things for any of the students, on line or on campus. It's really up to, more or less, the student to take the initiative to be part of that. I, personally, have my own life going on and I don't take part of that. I can't really say it's anybody's fault than my own, probably. But that goes back to the point of life.	Students get what they want to out of the college experience. Also coded as 11330 – Culture – Source, Campus; 10223 – Students, Prior experiences, instructor methods, on-campus work; and 11320 – Culture, Source, Students
10300	SF01	5e	138	I, personally, have my own life going on and I don't take part of that. I can't really say it's anybody's fault than my own, probably. But that goes back to the point of life.	Non-traditional students will likely not want the same involvement/connection
	AE01	5e	139	<i>That's very true, and the reason you're taking on line classes.</i>	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	SF01	5e	140	That's right.	
	AE01	5	141	<i>What do you think these programs add to that culture?</i>	
11200	SF01	5	142	It adds a lot so then everybody can experience part of being that culture.	
	AE01	5e	143	<i>What suggestions do you have for your institution about how to connect the online students to college life?</i>	
11200	SF01	5e	144	I guess making them more aware of what's going on, and it really will depend, I guess, on the professor. I will say, certain ones that I've taken from, they make us more aware of what goes on at the school. You made us more aware of recognizing cultures anywhere, our next-door neighbors, college, anywhere. Most people, had things like that been going on in the school, you'd go to some initiative to look for that. Anybody else – any other class – I think I took a class before and she would list on the calendar things that were going on in the school that had nothing to do with her. Just in general, she did. So that's the only difference.	Also coded as 11310 – Culture, Source, Instructors; Though the question focused on what the college could do, the answer clearly reflected that for online students, the amount of connection fell on the methods used by faculty
11310	SF01	5e	145	I guess making them more aware of what's going on, and it really will depend, I guess, on the professor. I will say, certain ones that I've taken from, they make us more aware of what goes on at the school. You made us more aware of recognizing cultures anywhere, our next-door neighbors, college, anywhere. Most people, had things like that been going on in the school, you'd go to some initiative to look for that. Anybody else – any other class – I think I took a class before and she would list on the calendar things that were going on in the school that had nothing to do with her. Just in general, she did. So that's the only difference.	Also coded as 11200 – Culture, How it is experienced; Though the question focused on what the college could do, the answer clearly reflected that for online students, the amount of connection fell on the methods used by faculty
	AE01	5e	146	<i>Do you have any suggestions for the way staff or administration could make you feel more connected to the college culture, college life?</i>	
11500	SF01	5e	147	It's more they keep us posted with emailings or newsletters or things like that about what's going on at school.	All of these suggestions are about what is going on on campus
	AE01	5e	148	<i>Okay. Is there anyone else who might help an online student feel part of the college culture?</i>	
11320	SF01	5e	149	No. Just other students. That would be it.	
	AE01	5e	150	<i>How could other students help?</i>	
11000	SF01	5e	151	I guess finding out if maybe they could ever get a list of on line – I know that there are people that go to school, on line classes, and also go to class there, that might could get people more involved.	Peer pressure for involvement?
	AE01	5f	152	<i>Sure. A little peer pressure for on line involvement. So how might be part of the college culture during your on line coursework help you?</i>	
	SF01	5f	153	Repeat that again. You're making me think.	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	AE01	5f	154	<i>That's okay. As an online student, how might it help you to be part of the college culture?</i>	
11410	SF01	5f	155	I guess there are classes where you'd learn a little bit more than you would than just in the class. You can ask – some of our classes – all of my classes, we've had to introduce ourselves and tell us a little bit about ourselves, whereas in class, they don't do that as much.	No clear help to be part of an online culture?
	AE01	5f	156	<i>Really? That's too bad.</i>	
	SF01	5f	157	I know. Most of people have issues about themselves or self-confidence standing up and telling who they are and what they're here for, whereas on line, you can be anybody you want to be, or you can be yourself and feel free to type it because you don't have twenty or thirty other of your peers sitting there looking at you.	More confidence sitting in front of the faceless computer – many studies have supported this
	AE01	5f	158	<i>That's true. Could it hurt you at all to have your instructors or peers or the college try to get you involved in the college culture?</i>	
11420	SF01	5f	159	I don't think so. I don't think it would hurt you. Everybody can broaden their horizons.	
	AE01	5g	160	<i>Okay. Do you see any need, as an online student, to be part of the college culture?</i>	
11500	SF01	5g	161	For me, personally, I'm going to say no because I have so much – and that's a lot of the reasons there are people – maybe if I was younger and didn't have children and a house and a family, maybe I would be more inclined to be involved in what goes on at school. But I have so much going on every day, that to me, the college – and that's any college, it's more for the younger crowd. Not that I'm old by any means. It's just more people that – they try to get a lot of people involved, and it's more people that don't have the responsibilities that I do.	Also coded as 10300 – Students, Priorities; and 10400 – Students, Needs; I originally thought students would want to be a part of the culture, but online students typically choose this delivery method because of their competing priorities
10300	SF01	5g	162	For me, personally, I'm going to say no because I have so much – and that's a lot of the reasons there are people – maybe if I was younger and didn't have children and a house and a family, maybe I would be more inclined to be involved in what goes on at school. But I have so much going on every day, that to me, the college – and that's any college, it's more for the younger crowd. Not that I'm old by any means. It's just more people that – they try to get a lot of people involved, and it's more people that don't have the responsibilities that I do.	Also coded as 11500 – Culture, Expectations; and 10400 – Students, Needs; I originally thought students would want to be a part of the culture, but online students typically choose this delivery method because of their competing priorities

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
10400	SF01	5g	163	For me, personally, I'm going to say no because I have so much – and that's a lot of the reasons there are people – maybe if I was younger and didn't have children and a house and a family, maybe I would be more inclined to be involved in what goes on at school. But I have so much going on every day, that to me, the college – and that's any college, it's more for the younger crowd. Not that I'm old by any means. It's just more people that – they try to get a lot of people involved, and it's more people that don't have the responsibilities that I do.	Also coded as 11500 – Culture, Expectations; and 10300 – Students, Priorities; I originally thought students would want to be a part of the culture, but online students typically choose this delivery method because of their competing priorities
	AE01	5g	164	<i>I completely understand that. Don't think that you're letting me down by saying that.</i>	
	SF01	5g	165	I was just trying to be honest.	
	AE01	6a	166	<i>And I appreciate that. Please be honest. That's the cornerstone of my study. I'd like to switch gears just a little bit and talk to you about social networking sites. Could you tell me about your experiences in Second Life during this class?</i>	
13112	SF01	6a	167	Well, I did the Second Life a couple of times online with the class. It was a little hard for me to get used to. I've been in a few other social networks on line. It was just hard for me to navigate around. I don't think it was actually Second Life. I think it was more the operator than Second Life. I think that was mostly my issue.	Did I not require enough SL activities?
	AE01	6a	168	<i>So was it just getting around in the world and learning how to walk and everything?</i>	
13110	SF01	6a	169	It was, and a lot of times – this is just me. This is my schedule. A lot of times, the programs we got together were 8:30 and 9:00 at night, and that wasn't a good time for me personally. But that's the only problem I had with it is that I would try to schedule enough – like, "Okay. I'm going to be at this tonight". And by the time, something would come up with kids or family and trying to get them situated, and then before I knew it, time had slipped passed me. That was the only real problem I had with Second Life.	Also coded as 10300 – Students, Priorities; Should synchronous class time be part of online classes?
10300	SF01	6a	170	It was, and a lot of times – this is just me. This is my schedule. A lot of times, the programs we got together were 8:30 and 9:00 at night, and that wasn't a good time for me personally. But that's the only problem I had with it is that I would try to schedule enough – like, "Okay. I'm going to be at this tonight". And by the time, something would come up with kids or family and trying to get them situated, and then before I knew it, time had slipped passed me. That was the only real problem I had with Second Life.	Also coded as Social Networking Sites, Second Life, Barriers; Should synchronous class time be part of online classes?
	AE01	6a	171	<i>So you didn't have any problems getting signed up or –</i>	
	SF01	6a	172	No. No problems at all.	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	AE01	6b	173	<i>Good. So how connected did you feel to your instructor within Second Life?</i>	
13131	SF01	6b	174	It was neat because you were my instructor and you were messaging me back. I think I was one of the first ones the night of the mixer, the very first mixer, who started chatting privately back and forth. I remember you made a comment like that. Like I said, I've also been involved in other little networks like that.	Students feel accomplished when they "get it"
	AE01	6	175	<i>What other social networking sites have you used?</i>	
13120	SF01	6	176	Of course, I use Facebook. Who doesn't?	
	AE01	6	177	<i>Of course.</i>	
13120	SF01	6	178	Exactly, and MySpace. And I have a little business that I have, and from that business I did a lot of research in these candle sites. I make my own candles. So in learning and researching, I've been in these little social networks where we've been able to chat like that.	
	AE01	6	179	<i>Oh, that's very cool. So you've basically built a community yourself.</i>	
	SF01	6	180	Right.	
	AE01	6	181	<i>Okay. So back to Second Life. How connected did you feel to your peers, the other students in the class, when we were in Second Life?</i>	
13132	SF01	6	182	It was really neat because I could talk to them then about things and we'd discuss the classes and the chats and things like that.	Like the personal nature of it
	AE01	6	183	<i>How often did you actually get to talk to some of the other students?</i>	
13132	SF01	6	184	Usually every time I went on, which was three or four times, I think. And even, I think, there was one time I think I was there and nobody else – I guess they were trying to get accustomed to what we were doing, and they were there. So that was pretty neat.	
	AE01	6c	185	<i>So what did you enjoy about the activities and/or assignments in Second Life?</i>	
13113	SF01	6c/6d	186	Well, we had the scavenger hunt and I completely got confused in what I was doing on that and being that I've worked with computers before, it made me so frustrated I kind of let it get the best of me.	Studies relating to technological frustrations to relate to this?
	AE01	6d	187	<i>Oh, no.</i>	
	SF01	6d	188	Yeah.	
	AE01	6d	189	<i>What was so confusing about it?</i>	
13113	SF01	6d	190	Well, there was a place we went for the helicopter ride and I could never get to – I saw the sign. I was there. But I could never figure out where to get on the helicopter. It was crazy. And then we were supposed to find an address to teleport to somewhere else and the address I had teleported – I don't think I teleported to the right place. But I made the attempt anyway.	
	AE01	6	191	<i>Well, I appreciate it. Did it teach you something about Second Life?</i>	
13113	SF01	6	192	It did. I thought that if it is was something I had to do more often, I would get more accustomed to it.	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	AE01	6	193	<i>So what might help you get better acquainted with Second Life?</i>	
13100	SF01	6	194	Probably using it more than what I did because we didn't have to use it a lot in your class, just a few times. I guess if it was something more of a requirement during the course, then I would have probably gotten used to it and used it more.	Also coded as 14000 – Suggestions; Interesting comment, especially since SL participation was a required element of the course
14000	SF01	6	195	Probably using it more than what I did because we didn't have to use it a lot in your class, just a few times. I guess if it was something more of a requirement during the course, then I would have probably gotten used to it and used it more.	Also coded as 13100 – Social Networking Sites, Second Life; Interesting comment, especially since SL participation was a required element of the course
	AE01	6	196	<i>Okay. Definitely, the more we use something, the easier it becomes, right?</i>	
	SF01	6	197	That's right.	
	AE01	6e	198	<i>What was the culture of our class within Second Life?</i>	
13140	SF01	6e	199	We were there for the same beliefs and reasons, to learn more about ourselves and each other.	
	AE01	6e	200	<i>Did you learn anything about your peers?</i>	
13132	SF01	6e	201	Some of them I did. We discussed with each other, but no. I didn't talk to them that much. A little bit, but not that much.	
	AE01	6f	202	<i>So how might social networking sites – you mentioned you're on MySpace – excuse me, Facebook – but I'm also referring to MySpace, Second Life, and of course, there's so many others. How might those sites help you feel more connected to your peers, instructor and to the college community?</i>	
12200	SF01	6f	203	Well, Facebook and MySpace are great because I've connected with people that I haven't – some that I went to school with in another state I've been able to connect to. A lot of my family that doesn't live here, we connect and talk and know what's going on in each other's lives. So I love them. I'm always checking Facebook because I like knowing what's going on with them.	Also coded as 13000 – Social Networking Sites
13000	SF01	6f	204	Well, Facebook and MySpace are great because I've connected with people that I haven't – some that I went to school with in another state I've been able to connect to. A lot of my family that doesn't live here, we connect and talk and know what's going on in each other's lives. So I love them. I'm always checking Facebook because I like knowing what's going on with them.	Also coded as 12200 – Connection, Members
	AE01	6f	205	<i>Have you connected with any of the other students at the college through Facebook?</i>	
13000	SF01	6f	206	Not through Facebook.	

Code	ID	Q #	Turn #	Data	Notes
	AE01	6f	207	<i>Could you see that being useful at all?</i>	
	SF01	6f	208	Sure. Sure.	
	AE01	6f	209	<i>Do you think you'd have the same type of connection with them as you might have with a friend, or could you ever?</i>	
12200	SF01	6f	210	Yes, because you would see what they are doing, and pictures of their life or their family because so many people put so much of that on there.	Also coded as 13000 – Social Networking Sites
13000	SF01	6f	211	Yes, because you would see what they are doing, and pictures of their life or their family because so many people put so much of that on there.	Also coded as 12200 – Connection, Members
	AE01	6f	212	<i>Oh, yeah. We probably share just a little bit too much, don't you think?</i>	
	SF01	6f	213	We probably do. Yes.	
	AE01	7a	214	<i>So based on your experiences in this class and any other on line classes that you've taken, what do you think that the college can do to improve online education?</i>	
10200	SF01	7a	215	Right now, they already do a lot of surveys and things like that of our classes. I've been really impressed with Darton's online classes, a lot, and I've had a lot of people tell me that they, themselves, have been trying it and they really like it.	
	AE01	7a	216	<i>Good. Have you ever seen anything change based on feedback that you've given?</i>	
10200	SF01	7a	217	No. I've always pretty much given good feedback. I think the only negative feedback I've given is more on a teacher and their ability to teach than anything else.	
	AE01	7b	218	<i>Sure. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your on line experiences?</i>	
	SF01	7b	219	No. I think I've pretty much covered it.	
	AE01		220	<i>Okay. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me, and I'll definitely be putting all of this information into my study.</i>	
	SF01		221	Thank you.	
	AE01		222	<i>Well, thank you. I'll be sending you those documents I told you about.</i>	
	SF01		223	Okay, great. Thanks.	
	AE01		224	<i>Okay. Have a good night.</i>	
	SF01		225	You, too. Bye.	

Appendix D – Facilitating Learning Online Course Syllabus

A. Homepage Information
1. Course Syllabus
2. Course Content Information See objectives as well as assignments for course content. Students will be given access to websites, academic journal articles, and online activities to learn the material as it relates to online teaching.
3. Orientation Information:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome & Greeting for Students Welcome to your first course on Issues on Online Teaching. Although this course is recommended for individuals who teach online, everyone who has an interest in online teaching need this course. Issues in Online Teaching will provide students the opportunity to discover key issues in online instructions. This class could prove to be challenging and rewarding for individuals interested in creating an effective online class. After the completion of this course you will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Identify online teaching issues in an undergraduate Hybrid course. * Compare and contrast teaching effectiveness in hybrid and Online courses taught by traditional classroom instructors * Analyze trends of motivating students to learn. * Locate and develop ways to improve student success in the e-classroom. * Describe student and teacher roles in online classes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting Started in the Course Check to see if your course is taught via WebCT by looking at the appropriate course list below. If your course is not taught using WebCT, you will find special instructions there. Please E-mail your instructor! Contact information is available in the course lists below. If your course uses WebCT (as most do), get your ID and password, then log into WebCT, and you're ready to go! However is you have any questions about WEBCT simple contact Emerging Technology Support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution Information Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology (Skill) Requirements To effectively participate in the this course you need to have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mastery of basic computer skills and software applications * Online skills including basic proficiency using web browsers, website navigation, search engines, and e-mail communication * Document management skills including file management, attaching files, uploading and downloading files and understanding of various file formats * Basic familiarity with WebCT Campus Edition or WebCT Vista course management system * Hardware, Software and Plug-ins Access to a computer with Internet connection and email * Microsoft Word and PowerPoint * Adobe Acrobat Reader * Web Browser: A current recommended browser for WebCT Vista * For the most up-to-date list of supported web browsers, go to: http://www.webct.com/tuneup * Video and audio clips used in this course require QuickTime (free version)

* Interactive animations and some quizzes used in this course require Flash Player

- **Technical Support Information**

When using WebCT, you should use one of these browsers:

- * Netscape Navigator 6.2.x, 7.0, or 7.1
- * Mozilla 1.5, 1.6
- * Internet Explorer 5.0, 5.5, or 6.0 (not 5.5SP1)
- * AOL 7.0, 8.0, or 9.0
- * If you use other browsers, you may experience a variety of problems (some very minor, some more significant). You can find your browser version by selecting the Help menu at the top of your browser window, then selecting the "About" item (as in "About Internet Explorer" or "About Netscape").
- * We recommend you use the WebCT Browser Tune-up service. It can help you make sure your browser is correctly configured to work properly with WebCT.

B. Content for Online Course Syllabus:

4. Name of Course and Description

Fundamentals and Principles of E-Teaching

This E-Teaching class is a facilitated online course designed for teachers at the high school/college level who teach online classes. This E-Course will prepare the instructor with effective teaching strategies for the online environment by leading them through activities, concepts and techniques that encourage effective online teaching.

Name: Jimmy Ballenger
 Institution: Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
 Email: jballenger@abac.edu
 Phone: (229) 391-4939

Office Hours: Monday-Friday
 10:00-12:00

5. Required Texts and Other Resources

Teaching Online: A Practical Guide
 by Susan Schor Ko & Steve Rossen

6. Course Goal and Objectives

-To prepare the potential e-instructor with solutions to issues in online teaching.

#1-The learner will identify teaching issues in an online course.

#2- The learner will compare and contrast teaching effectiveness online courses taught by traditional classroom instructors.

#3- The learner will locate and develop ways to improve student success in the e-classroom.

#4- The learner will describe a teacher's role as facilitator in online classes.

7. Course Content Information

See objectives as well as assignments for course content. Students will be given access to websites, academic journal articles, and online activities to learn the material as it relates to online teaching.

8. Course Calendar or Schedule

PHASE I:

Week 1: Chapter 1-- "Teaching Online: An Overview"

Week 2: Chapter 2 - "Scouting The Territory: Exploring Your Institutions Resources"

PHASE II:

Week 3: Chapter 3 - "Course Conversion"

Week 4: Chapter 4 - "Creating an Effective Online Syllabus"

Week 5: Chapter 5 - "Building an Online Classroom"

Week 6: Chapter 6 - "Student Activities in an Online Environment"

Week 7: Chapter 7 - "Creating Courseware"

Week 8: Chapter 8 - "Copyright and Intellectual Property"

PHASE III:

Week 9: Chapter 9- "Preparing Students for Online Learning"

Week 10: Chapter 10- "Classroom Management: General Considerations"

Week 11: Chapter 11 - "Classroom Management: Special Issues"

Week 12: Chapter 12 - "Integrating Online Elements"

PHASE IV:

Week 13: Chapter 13- "Taking Advantage of New Opportunities"

Week 14: Chapter 14 - "Where Do We Go From Here?"

9. Performance and Evaluation

Rubrics: Will be used to give students an idea of what the teacher is trying to accomplish in the class and why it is important. The rubric will show students what is considered a poor, good, or excellent performance.

Journal Writing: Will be used in the form of reflective journals (best practices). They

will be used to evaluate student learning and enhance student-teacher communication.

Policy Information:

Communication Policy:

Standards and Expectations for email, discussion, chat.

Our communication in this course is most important, especially since I will not see you in person on a regular basis. I am extremely conscientious about checking my email at least twice daily, unless I am out of town. You will receive notices ahead of time if I will be away from computer access. I pride myself on “student service” and am committed to returning your phone call or email promptly. More considerations about communication can be found below.

EMAIL:

- * My e-mail is for professional use only. I do NOT want to receive forwards or non-class related messages from students
- * Class assignments should be sent via WebCT, unless you have obtained prior approval from the instructor
- * You must check your email 3 times per week.
- * Use email to communicate with me about problems. I can't know what is going on in your life if you don't let me know.
- * Allow 24 hours turn around time for me to respond to emails. If I haven't responded to an email, assume I didn't receive it for some reason and email me again.

DISCUSSION AND CHAT:

- * Discussion must consist of a conversation between students. Read the posting before you and add new information to the discussion.
- * Be considerate of your classmates. Avoid language that can marginalize students in this class. Inappropriate language will not be tolerated.
- * Consider netiquette rules. For example, do NOT write in all capital letters. This signifies yelling at your classmates and instructor.

Assignment Policy

Please identify that this course includes time-sensitive deadlines. The instructor simply cannot accept numerous late assignments, therefore you need to plan ahead to ensure that your assignments are completed on time. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO FINALIZE YOUR ASSIGNMENTS!** Disasters historically occur when students wait until the 11th hour, whether intentional or unintentional. If I do not receive your assignment on the prescribed day AND if I do not hear from you, I will assume that you are not submitting that particular assignment and you will receive a “zero”. IF you are granted an extension (which will only be provided with approval via a telephone or email consultation), you will simply receive a passing grade for the assignment. I cannot guarantee a comprehensive evaluation.

Students will be graded based on Participation, Self-Assessments, Quizzes, and Activities. Please see Grading and Assessment Policy for more details.

Academic Honesty Policy

Students are expected to uphold the school's standard of conduct relating to academic honesty. Students assume full responsibility for the content and integrity of the academic work they submit. The guiding principle of academic integrity shall be that a student's submitted work, examinations, reports, and projects must be that of the student's own work. Students shall be guilty of violating the honor code if they:

- * Represent the work of others as their own.
- * Use or obtain unauthorized assistance in any academic work.
- * Give unauthorized assistance to other students.
- * Modify, without instructor approval, an examination, paper, record, or report for the purpose of obtaining additional credit.

* Misrepresent the content of submitted work.

The penalty for violating the honor code is severe. Any student violating the honor code is subject to receive a failing grade for the assignment or course and will be reported to the Office of Student Affairs. If a student is unclear about whether a particular situation may constitute an honor code violation, the student should meet with the instructor to discuss the situation.

For this class, it is permissible to assist classmates in general discussions of computing techniques. General advice and interaction are encouraged. Each person, however, must develop his or her own solutions to the assigned homework and laboratory exercises. Students may not "work together" on graded assignments. Such collaboration constitutes cheating, unless it is a grouped assignment, indicated within the information sheet for the assignment. A student may not use or copy (by any means) another's work (or portions of it) and represent it as his/her own. If you need help on an assignment, contact your instructor or the TA, not other classmates.

Grading and Assessment Policy

Participation:

Student participation will be graded based on student's demonstration of preparation, evidence of reading and responding to other students' comments and concerns, and ability to add new information to a discussion to keep the discussion from becoming stagnated.

Students will be expected to post a minimum of two academic posts per week. These are postings that add academically relevant information to the discussion. Your categories for posting are: QUESTION, COMMENT, ADVICE, FOLLOW-UP, and RESPONSE. These will be the main focus of the class discussions.

Self-Assessments:

Students will complete three self-assessments throughout the semester. Their first assessment will be a baseline questionnaire to assess their skills and attitudes toward the content subjects. The second assessment demonstrates progress at the halfway point of the semester. The third assessment wraps up students' ideas about the content and evaluates the change that has occurred throughout the semester. These assessments are not graded. They are provided to allow students to determine areas of improvement.

Quizzes:

Students will complete 10 quizzes throughout the semester. These are completed through the "online quizzes" section and allow students to check their understanding of material presented. Students receive credit for completing the quiz and are used as a tool to determine gaps in information gained during the section's reading assignments.

Appendix E – Course Orientation

C U L T U R A L D I V E R S I T Y O N L I N E
C O U R S E O R I E N T A T I O N

Welcome to COMM 1000 ONLINE!

Welcome to COMM 1000 Online! The following course orientation is designed to help students gain a better understanding the dynamics for this course. **PLEASE READ ALL THE WAY TO THE END!!!**

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:***WebCT VISTA:***

This course will be using WebCT VISTA 8. To access our course you can use the following link: <https://darton8.view.usg.edu/webct/logonDisplay.dowebct?insId=21262011&glcid=URN:X-WEBCT-VISTA-V1:031305b9-a818-5d85-016b-ced811d817d4&insName=Darton%20College> or you can go to Darton's homepage. Click on the GeorgiaView tab across the top.

JAVA:

WebCT Vista cannot operate properly without the latest version of Java. To identify whether or not your computer (or the computer you are using to access this course) has Java, look for the small steaming coffee cup icon in the tool bar located at the bottom right corner of your computer screen. If you do not have Java, or you just want to download the latest version, you can go to www.java.com. This download is free.

Mozilla Firefox:

It is suggested that students (and instructors) use Mozilla Firefox as their browser when using WebCT Vista. Although WebCT Vista CAN operate using Internet Explorer, many of the features of vista cause Internet Explorer to have errors.

MyDC:

You will be required to access various information AND upload files through MyDC throughout the semester (There is also a link to access WebCT Vista within the "my courses" section of MyDC). You can access MyDC through Darton's homepage, or by clicking the following link: <https://portal.darton.edu/cp/home/displaylogin>. Please be aware that you must access your MyDC account every 90 day or the account will become inactive. To reactivate your account, please contact the *Information Technology Helpdesk* at (229) 317-6704.

Audacity:

You will be required to use Audacity to record your self-introduction speech for this course. Audacity is a FREE voice-recording program.

DOWNLOADING AUDACITY

- 1) Download Audacity to your computer by following the link in the Audacity tutorial (on the course homepage in WebCT)
- 2) Click on the LAME.dll link within the “Audacity Download” folder.
- 3) When you click on the link it will ask whether or not you want to “open” or “save to disk”. Select “save to disk”.
- 4) You just need to put this Lame.dll file in your Audacity program file.
 - a. Select “My Computer”
 - b. Select “C:”
 - c. Select “Program Files”
 - d. Select “Audacity” folder
 - e. Put the Lame.dll file anywhere in that Audacity folder
- 5) If your computer is like mine, it automatically saves my download to my desktop. If this is the case, just cut and paste the file into the Audacity program folder.

SAVING YOUR FILES USING AUDACITY

- 1) Once you have recorded your speech you will need to save it.
- 2) DO NOT SELECT THE ÒSAVE ASÓ OPTION
- 3) To save your file you will need to “export” it as either a .wav or MP3 file.
- 4) I prefer MP3 files because they are more compact (smaller file size).
- 5) Once you have saved your file make sure that the file name says “.mp3” or “.wav”. For example: AlyciasSelfIntro.mp3 or AlyciasSelfIntro.wav
- 6) If your file name ends in .aup you have saved your file as a project. I CAN NOT OPEN ANY FILE THAT ENDS IN .AUP.

ANSWERS TO IMPORTANT COURSE QUESTIONS:

- **What is an online Cultural Diversity course?**
- **How much time will I need to dedicate to this course on a weekly basis?**
- **What will be the mechanics of this online Cultural Diversity course?**
- **What materials are required?**
- **How will I learn the course material?**
- **What types of assignments can I expect?**
- **When are assignments due, and how will I turn them in?**
- **Will it be easy to communicate with my instructor for this course?**
- **Will it be easy to communicate with my classmates in this course?**
- **What if I have technology related problems?**
- **What if I have course related problems?**
- **How do I get a copy of the syllabus and course schedule?**

WHAT IS AN ONLINE CULTURAL DIVERSITY COURSE?

Cultural Diversity online is designed to meet the schedule demands of our busy Darton students. The **entire** course content will be delivered through WebCT (in terms of weekly online assignments and occasional online meetings) and the course textbook (Hall, Among Cultures). Students will also complete course activities in Second Life (visit www.secondlife.com for more information). The students will **not** meet with the course instructor in a classroom, however there will be required weekly meetings online. You can think of WebCT as your virtual classroom.

Please be aware that you (as a student) will be required to spend just as much time reviewing course material as you would in a traditional classroom course.

WEEKLY TIME REQUIREMENTS: Minimum of 6 total hours (1 ½ in class, 4 ½ online)
Lecture Material - COMM 1000 is a 2-credit course. This means that a student taking COMM 1000 in the traditional classroom format would spend 100 minutes (1 hour, 40 minutes) per week in class (two 50-minute sessions) for 16 weeks. This calculates to roughly 27 hours of *classroom* commitment per semester. Courses designed for the **a-term**, such as this one, spend the same 27 total hours in class, but cram the information into a short 7 and a half-week period of time (215 minutes or 3 ½+ hours a week in class). During this traditional classroom time, cultural diversity instructors provide lecture material, supplemental course materials, and answer questions. Therefore, as an online student you should plan to dedicate a minimum of 3 ½ hours a week outside of class specifically to reviewing the book and completing classroom assignments. “Online” classroom time will be reserved mainly for reviewing online lectures, participating in Second Life activities, and participating in the discussion forum.

Assignments - Although about 50% of a student’s time in a traditional class is spent sitting in class listening to the instructor, the other 50% is spent outside the classroom completing assignments. This is true for an online student too. Be sure to spend adequate time on coursework and assignments.

Flexibility - That being said, this online cultural diversity course offers students GREAT flexibility. Students enrolled in this course can review the material during whatever times work best with THEIR schedule. **My only requirement is that you “check-in” at least every 36 hours.** This means that I will need you to login to WebCT on a regular basis to check for e-mails and updates. I am a VERY interactive instructor and will often send out suggestions, answer questions, and address concerns through e-mail and other postings. This is important information and it is your responsibility to check our WebCT course often enough to stay up-to-date! Additionally you will be required to participate in real-time Second Life activities. Be aware of the dates and times of these upcoming events.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Textbook: Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication, 2nd edition Bradford Hall, ©2005, ISBN 0534642489

Video Recording Device: You will be required to video-record several of your speeches. The following video formats are acceptable:

VHS
 VHS-C
 Digital

8mm tapes are NOT acceptable (There is no adaptor available to view this type of tape, and I do not have an 8mm video recorder. Assignments submitted on 8mm videotapes will NOT receive credit).

Computer Microphone: Audacity is a voice-recording program that you will be required to use to create an MP3 or Wav file of your self-introduction speech. You may also use it during another speech for a Voice-Over-PowerPoint presentation. Additionally, a microphone will be required during your presentation in Second Life at the end of the semester. Most laptop computers have a built-in microphone. You can also purchase a microphone in the computer/electronics section of most stores (Wal-Mart, Target, etc.) These microphones are usually under \$10. Helpful hint: This type of product seems to be much cheaper when purchased online rather than in-store (check <http://www.walmart.com>).

Second Life: Download the free Second Life program at www.secondlife.com. You can check if your computer meets the minimum system requirements needed to use Second Life at <http://secondlife.com/support/sysreqs.php>.

Internet: Online classes work best when using cable or DSL Internet services. Dial up will not work effectively for the purpose of this class because it is unreliable for staying connected during synchronous (real-time) classroom activities. Second Life also requires the use of cable or DSL Internet services.

*****Easy access to a computer with Internet and PowerPoint capabilities*****

METHODS OF LEARNING:

Course material in online courses is delivered to students through WebCT using a combination of the textbook, instructor lectures (power points), supplemental materials, and assignments. The course content has been broken up into various Learning Modules. Students should follow the course schedule to determine which textbook chapter(s), learning module(s), and assignments should be completed each week of the course. Class activities will also include social events, a scavenger hunt, interaction with other members, and a speech all within Second Life.

ASSIGNMENTS:

This is a brief overview of each of the assignments (speeches, exams & quizzes, journals, and reports) required for this course. Specific details for each assignment are located in the “Assignments” section of WebCT.

SPEECHES: There will be THREE (3) required individual speeches and ONE (1) group presentation in this course. Audio-recorded speeches will use Audacity, as discussed previously. Two of the other speeches will be videotaped. To do this you will need to have five audience members. One of them will serve as your cameraperson and will point the video camera at you, then turn it to pan the audience, and then put the camera back on you without any break in the video. At the end of your speech the cameraperson should pan the audience again. While videotaping, be sure to make eye contact with your audience, not the camera. Another speech will be a group speech delivered as a voice-over-PowerPoint. One of these speeches will also be delivered in Second Life.

+ ***Speech #1: Self-Introduction Speech Assignment***

You will introduce yourself to the class from a cultural perspective. This is the easiest topic (YOURSELF) for you to discuss, so it should be easy for you to prepare. The

assignment is split into 2 parts. First, you will submit a digital photograph of yourself. Please email this picture in .jpg or .gif formats. Do not copy and paste into a Word document. Using the photographs, I will create a class yearbook during the first week of class. This yearbook will allow you to become familiar with your classmates. Secondly, you will audio-record a 2-3 minute presentation explaining your culture, how you see yourself, what you would like to take away from the class. In your presentation you will outline the 5 cultural values described in the “introduction to culture” lecture. You will be required to type out this speech in paragraph form and submit it along with your audio-recording and digital picture on the due date. See the grade sheet for more information.

+ ***Speech #2: Narrative Speech Assignment***

For the Narrative Speech Assignment, I want you to select a story (for example, a fable, a myth, a true story, a fairy tale, a legend) that comes out of a culture other than your own which can help your audience understand some aspect of the culture from which the narrative comes. You will read or paraphrase the narrative and then analyze it from several cultural perspectives. This speech will be videotaped in front of five audience members and sent to the instructor. See the grade sheet for more information.

+ ***Speech #3: Cultural Interview Speech***

You will find and interview a member of a culture different than your own. You can interview someone in person (Darton has a lot of wonderful international students), interview someone from Second Life, OR join a cultural group from Yahoo Groups. You will be required to ask them a minimum of 20 questions. You can ask about almost anything that helps you understand their culture better, such as how they spend their free time, traditions, their education system, etc. Please remember to use simple English in your communication if you are actually communicating with someone who speaks English as a second language. Once you have completed your interview, review your notes/e-mails and pick out the most interesting/important facts that you learned about the new culture. You will then give a 4-6 minute informative presentation (including the use of a visual aid) regarding what you learned from this cultural experience. This speech will be videotaped in front of five audience members and sent to the instructor. See the grade sheet for more information.

+ ***Speech #4: Group Informative Speech Project***

The class will be divided into groups to complete this speech. As a group, you will research a new culture. Most cultures are extremely complex and dynamic, so after completing your initial research, you will need to choose a specific cultural dynamic within the culture to focus on. Such a dynamic could include rituals (e.g., weddings or funerals), nonverbal artifacts (e.g. clothing styles), and/or meal traditions. The group will create a voice-over Power Point presentation to present their research. All members of the group will be required to have a speaking role in the presentation. See the grade sheet for more information.

EXAMS & QUIZZES

+ *Exams:*

There will be TWO (2) required online exams for this course (a midterm and a final). Both exams may include true/false, short answer, multiple choice, matching, and essay questions. I want to see that you can remember the concepts and theories that you have learned and can apply them. Both exams will be comprehensive and will include lecture material, reading assignments, information included in other handouts, and concepts included in classroom activities. Each exam will be taken through WebCT and will be open-note and open book, but will have a specific time limit.

+ *Quizzes:*

There will be 9 online quizzes posted to WebCT. The quiz due dates are posted on the course schedule and should be completed at some point during the week that each is due. For example, you have the entire first full week of classes to complete The Orientation Quiz and Quiz #1. Quizzes are worth 5 points each.

REPORTS

+ *Cultural Interview Summary*

Due to the fact that 4-6 minutes is a very brief amount of time, you will not get a chance to share ALL of the wonderful details you learned about the new culture in your *Cultural Interview Speech*. With this in mind you will need to create a comprehensive report of your experience. This report should be 2-3 (typed, double-spaced) pages, and include an overview of the interviewee/pen pal, a summary of what you discussed, and your reactions to this experience. You should also include the transcripts from your interview or a copy of all of your e-mail correspondences. This report should not be the same content as in the cultural interview speech.

+ *Journal Entries*

You will be asked to complete several journal entries throughout the semester. The questions will ask you to think critically about the concepts we have discussed in class and concepts covered in the book. Some journal entries will only test your knowledge of the material and other entries will ask you to apply the knowledge you have gained. Some journal entries will ask you to reflect on your experiences in Second Life and in the class. Completing journal entries will give you the opportunity to ask me questions, improve your writing skills, and for you to communicate with me privately. I will be the only one to read your journals.

PARTICIPATION

+ *Discussion Forum Participation*

Participation in the Discussion Forum consists of responding to discussion questions posted under "Discussion Forum." You will earn one point for each academically based question you post and two points for each thoughtful response to an academic question. Your response should be a continuation of the conversation, so please read previous postings before responding. Upon completion of your 20 required points, you will be able to earn up to 20 points of extra credit based on your discussion forum participation. You will be able to build a positive online classroom environment by

communicating with your classmates and instructor.

+ ***Second Life Participation***

You will earn points for participating in social activities, scavenger hunts, classroom activities, etc. in Second Life. These points are not just awarded based on attendance, but on being a part of the activities and communicating with your classmates and instructor and Second Life members.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

+ **Due Dates:**

This course is a very intensive course because the course only runs for 7 and a half weeks. A quiz, speech, journal and/or other assignment will be due EVERY week. All due dates are posted in the **course schedule** (located on the course homepage in WebCT). Keeping up with assignment due dates is critical to your success in this course. Once a quiz closes, you will not have the opportunity to make it up. Additionally, I cannot accept numerous late video or audio taped speeches, therefore you will need to plan ahead to ensure that your speeches are completed on time. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO VIDEOTAPE YOUR SPEECHES!** Disasters historically occur when students wait until the 11th hour, whether intentional or unintentional. If I do not receive your videotape on the prescribed day AND if I do not hear from you, I will assume that you are not submitting that particular assignment and you will receive a “zero.” IF you are granted an extension (which will only be provided with approval via a telephone or e-mail consultation), you will simply receive a passing grade for the speech and outline and I cannot guarantee a comprehensive evaluation. Please let me know if you have any questions about any of the assignment due dates!

*****NOTE: ALL WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY 5 P.M. ON THURSDAYS FOR FULL CREDIT. FOR VIDEOTAPED SPEECHES, YOUR SPEECH MUST BE POSTMARKED BY THE TUESDAY BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT IS DUE.***

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES:

- + **Quizzes and Exams** - All quizzes, exams and other written material will be completed online through WebCT with automatic grading/scoring. Quizzes will be located under each weeks learning module. The midterm and final exams will be available only during the designated dates under the Assignments section.
- + **Digital Photograph** – Photographs should be emailed to alycia.ehlert@darton.edu. If the photograph is too large to email it directly, please send it to me using <http://www.yousendit.com/>. Yousendit.com is a free service that allows people to safely and easily send large files, available to the recipient for a limited period of time. The photograph document NAME should include your name and the assignment name (ex. alyciaehlertphoto.jpg).
- + **Speeches** – Some speeches will be submitted on videotape by sending the tape to the instructor. Another speeches use Audacity to complete an audio recording and can be emailed to the instructor. Please mail your assignment two days prior to the due date to

ensure it arrives on time.

WILL IT BE EASY TO COMMUNICATE WITH MY INSTRUCTOR?

YES!! You can communicate with me in MANY ways and I will hold regular office hours. I love communicating with students (remember I majored in communication, so I must enjoy it, at least a little).

Here are your options:

- + **WebCT E-mail:** I will monitor my WebCT e-mail at least once a day.
- + **Darton E-mail:** I will monitor my Darton e-mail account multiple times a day.
- + **Darton Office Phone:** You can call me at my Darton office phone, 229-317-6953. This phone number will connect you directly with my voicemail. Once you leave me a message, the advanced technology at Darton sends me an e-mail to let me know I have a message. I can then listen to the message and respond to you through WebCT or by returning your phone call.
- + **WebCT Chat:** WebCT has a chat function that works just like AOL instant messenger or MSN instant messenger. Anytime you are logged into WebCT, you can view which of your classmates is online (this includes me), and then send them an invitation to chat. To access this feature, look across the top of your screen for the tool bar (this is the bar that has the e-mail, discussion, etc.) Click the "more tools" option. Then select the "Who's Online" option. This will bring up a list of everyone that is currently online. Then you just put a check in the box next to the person you want to talk to and hit the "Send Chat Invitation" button at the bottom. If you just have a quick question and I'm online, you can send me a chat instead of sending an e-mail and get an instant answer!

WILL IT BE EASY TO COMMUNICATE WITH MY CLASSMATES?

YES!! You will have many opportunities to communicate with your classmates. The discussion forum feature in WebCT is a GREAT way to get-to-know each other, ask each other class-related questions, or just chit-chat. You can also use the WebCT "Chat" option discussed in the "Will it be Easy to Communicate With My Instructor" section. I also encourage those of you who regularly attend classes on campus at Darton to get in contact with each other. This will help when forming teams for the Group Informative Speech.

WHAT IF I HAVE TECHNOLOGY-RELATED PROBLEMS?

You are expected to be familiar with how to use a computer and WebCT to be successful in this (or any other) hybrid/online course. Although this may sound rude, it is not my job to teach you how to use WebCT or any of the course-required computer-related programs/hardware. My job is to teach you as much as I can about communication (and even more importantly how to improve your communication effectiveness) in the short time we have together this semester. If you contact me regarding a WebCT or computer-related question, I will just direct you to our VERY capable helpdesk staff!!

If you are having a problem with your computer or WebCT, please contact the WebCT helpdesk. Although I consider myself technologically advanced, I'm not very good at answering technology-related questions or solving technology-related problems (remember my degree is in communication!) The helpdesk is designed to walk you through even the most basic problem.

You can reach the helpdesk at (229) 317-6923 or 1-800-861-8318. They are available Monday - Friday (8am - 8pm). Please make sure you take these hours into consideration when you are planning to work on course material. I believe it is “Murphy’s Law” that you are more likely to have a technology problem if you wait until the night before something is due to start working on it. Keep in mind; if you are working on an assignment at 3am and you have problems, you are going to have to wait until the helpdesk opens at 8am for assistance!!!

WHAT IF I HAVE COURSE-RELATED QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

CONTACT ME!!! If you EVER have a question, comment, or concern, PLEASE don’t hesitate to contact me. Although I would like to consider myself a genius ☺ I am not a mind reader! This means that unless you TELL me, I won’t know. If you don’t ask me a question, I can’t answer it. If you don’t tell me about a problem, I can’t help you try to fix it. If you don’t tell me how much you love this class, I can’t do my happy dance.

HOW DO I GET A COPY OF THE SYLLABUS AND COURSE SCHEDULE?

Very easily. The course syllabus and course schedule are always available on WebCT. I would suggest printing both of these documents and keeping them in a safe place. If you lose either of these printed tools (or they get eaten by your dog, cat, rabbit, guinea pig, horse, little brother/sister, child, etc.) you can get another copy ANYTIME on WebCT. Both the syllabus and the course schedule will be listed on the homepage.

If there is ANYTHING that I have not covered in this orientation that you would like me to cover please refer to the “What if I have course related problems” section.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE READ THE COURSE ORIENTATION, PLEASE

- 1. REVIEW THE SYLLABUS**
- 2. REVIEW THE COURSE SCHEDULE**
- 3. COMPLETE THE ONLINE COURSE SCAVENGER HUNT**
- 4. ORIENT YOURSELF TO SECOND LIFE**
- 5. TAKE THE COURSE ORIENTATION QUIZ**

Appendix F – Course Syllabus

DARTON COLLEGE
COMM 1000: Cultural Diversity (Online)

Instructor Information**Instructor:**

Alycia Ehlert

E-mail:alycia.ehlert@darton.edu**Office Phone:**

(229) 317-6953

Office Hours:

Monday – Thursday: 2 – 4 p.m.

Course Textbook

Hall, B. J. (2005). *Among cultures: The challenge of communication*. (2nd ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (ISBN: 0-534-64248-9)

Catalog Course Description

This course emphasizes the patterns of public and interpersonal communication among and between cultural groups with strategies and skills for improving the quality of those interactions. This class will deepen the understanding of communication as a social process using the course as a public speaking forum.

Prerequisite

Successful completion of READ 0099.

Course Goals

COMM 1000 is a basic course designed to satisfy a two-credit requirement in Communication. In this course, the student should acquire a primary understanding of effective communication skills. This course will also introduce students to areas of study which will expand their knowledge and appreciation of the multi-cultural and multi-racial world in which they live. In this course, we will learn methods for preparing and delivering effective presentations. We will also study different cultures and learn how to be sensitive to the differences between people. This course satisfies the oral communication competency requirement for Darton College.

Course Objectives

The competencies that the student will be able to demonstrate are:

- 1) Students will analyze the basic components of major global cultures and core ideas of intercultural communication processes in different situations through written and oral presentations.
- 2) Students will analyze the differences and similarities between intercultural interactions and identities from within their own perspectives.
- 3) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the readings and lectures through quizzes, reading responses, journal entries, examinations, and class activities. Written assignments will adhere to rules of Standard English.

- 4) Students will deliver a minimum of four individual speeches. Speeches will increase in length (from 3 minutes to 6 minutes) and complexity (from personal experience and opinions to researching current events). Students will be required to use library resources in their research efforts for presentations.
- 5) Students will develop and utilize appropriate visual aids in their presentations.
- 6) Students will gain speaking experience and gain confidence in their speaking skills exemplified by their verbal and nonverbal efforts and will utilize audience analysis techniques in the preparation of their presentations.
- 7) Students will demonstrate effective listening skills and apply constructive evaluations to peer speeches.

Course Policies

Attendance & Participation: Due to this being an online class that does not meet in a classroom, attendance is monitored based on online involvement. Students must actively participate in the virtual classroom on WebCT, in addition to participation in activities in Second Life. Participation includes reviewing online lectures, posting/responding to the discussion forum, completing online quizzes, etc. As an online student you should plan to dedicate a minimum of 1 hour and 30 minutes a week specifically to reviewing the online lectures and another 4 hours and 30 minutes completing course assignments. As the instructor, I have the ability to “track” your participation on WebCT. Specifically I can monitor the frequency of your log-ins, the number of tasks that you are completing, and the sections of WebCT that you are viewing. If you are not actively participating in the course, Darton requires me to fill out an “excessive absence form”, which may affect your financial aid or cause you to be dropped from the course.

Due Dates: This course is a very intensive course because the course only runs for 7 and a half weeks. A quiz, speech, journal and/or other assignment will be due EVERY week. All due dates are posted in the **course schedule** (which is or will be located on the course homepage in WebCT). Keeping up with assignment due dates is critical to your success in this course. Once a quiz closes, you will not have the opportunity to make it up. Additionally, I cannot accept numerous late video or audiotaped speeches, therefore you will need to plan ahead to ensure that your speeches are completed on time. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO VIDEOTAPE YOUR SPEECHES!** Disasters historically occur when students wait until the 11th hour, whether intentional or unintentional. If I do not receive your videotape on the prescribed day AND if I do not hear from you, I will assume that you are not submitting that particular assignment and you will receive a “zero.” IF you are granted an extension (which will only be provided with approval via a telephone or e-mail consultation), you will simply receive a passing grade for the speech and outline and I cannot guarantee a comprehensive evaluation. Please let me know if you have any questions about any of the assignment due dates! *****NOTE: ALL WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY 5 P.M. ON THURSDAYS FOR FULL CREDIT. FOR VIDEOTAPE SPEECHES, YOUR SPEECH MUST BE POSTMARKED BY THE TUESDAY BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT IS DUE.***

Virtual Classroom Behavior: Appropriate classroom behavior is expected. My goal is to create a supportive and comfortable classroom environment. Therefore, I support the College's commitment to providing an equal opportunity for all students regardless of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, handicap, height, weight, or marital status. I will not tolerate classroom behavior that discriminates against anyone or makes anyone feel uncomfortable, so please respect the rights of other class members and the instructor.

E-mail: My e-mail address is for professional use only...I do NOT want to receive forwards or non-class related messages from students. Class assignments should be sent via WebCT, unless you have obtained prior approval from the instructor. If an assignment file is too large to submit through WebCT you can go to www.yousendit.com and upload your assignment, which can then be emailed to my email address listed above. You can also submit large assignments through MyDC. You must check your email 3 times per week. Use email to communicate with me about problems. I can't know what is going on in your life if you don't let me know. *NOTE: If you would like to contact me throughout the semester with questions, comments, or concerns about the course please use the e-mail function in WebCT.*

Academic Integrity: You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the Darton College policies and procedures that pertain to the student code of conduct. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, **multiple submission**, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. *Note: I consider it dishonest to turn in a speech that you have completed for a previously taken course without receiving prior permission.* If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, one of the following actions will take place: a) A reprimand from the instructor; b) A requirement to resubmit the assignment in which the irregularity occurred; c) A grade change for the course and/ or assignment which the irregularity occurred; d) Referral to the Dean of Students by the Vice President of Academic Affairs for Judicial Committee disposition. You should consult the Darton College Student Handbook or with me if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment, speech, or test.

****Violation of any of these course expectations could result in grade reduction of an assignment, failure of an assignment or the class, or other punishments deemed necessary by the instructor or college administration.**

Technology Requirements: You will be required to have access to a camcorder to record your speeches. Some digital cameras have a video function to help you with this and this file can be emailed to the instructor. Darton College does not provide this technology. You will also be required to have a computer microphone to record your first audio speech. You can purchase a computer microphone for under \$8 at www.walmart.com. If in the Albany area, you may be able to record this speech in the Foreign Language Lab on campus, if you ask the director nicely.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

Coursework: *Please be aware that the following is an overview of the tentative assignments that you will complete this semester. **Detailed instructions for the official course assignments will be posted on WebCT.*** This means that I reserve the right to add, remove, or change assignments at any time, but I will ALWAYS give you a formal assignment sheet.

Please note: It is easier for me to keep track of your assignments if you title them FirstLastAssignment, such as AlyciaEhlertJournal1.doc or AlyciaEhlertWrittenNarrativeSpeech.doc.

Speeches

There will be THREE (3) required individual speeches and ONE (1) group presentation in this course. Audio-recorded speeches will use Audacity, as discussed previously. Two of the other speeches will be videotaped. To do this you will need to have five audience members. One of them will serve as your cameraperson and will point the video camera at you, then turn it to pan the audience, and then put the camera back on you without any break in the video. At the end of your speech the cameraperson should pan the audience again. While videotaping, be sure to make eye contact with your audience, not the camera. Another speech will be a group speech delivered as a voice-over-PowerPoint. One of these speeches will also be delivered in Second Life. Videotaped speeches must be submitted in one of the following formats: VHS, VHS-C, or Digital. 8mm tapes are NOT acceptable.

Speech #1: Self-Introduction Speech Assignment

You will introduce yourself to the class from a cultural perspective. This is the easiest topic (YOURSELF) for you to discuss, so it should be easy for you to prepare. The assignment is split into 2 parts. First, you will submit a digital photograph of yourself. Please email this picture in .jpg or .gif formats. Using the photographs, I will create a class yearbook during the first week of class. This yearbook will allow you to become familiar with your classmates. Secondly, you will audio-record a 2-3 minute presentation explaining your culture, how you see yourself, what you would like to take away from the class. In your presentation you will outline the 5 cultural values described in the “introduction to culture” lecture. You will be required to type out this speech in paragraph form and submit it along with your audio-recording and digital picture on the due date.

Speech #2: Narrative Speech Assignment

For the Narrative Speech Assignment, I want you to select a story (for example, a fable, a myth, a true story, a fairy tale, a legend) that comes out of a culture other than your own which can help your audience understand some aspect of the culture from which the narrative comes. You will read or paraphrase the narrative and then analyze it from several cultural perspectives. This speech will be videotaped in front of five audience members and sent to the instructor. See the grade sheet for more information.

Speech #3: Cultural Interview Speech

You will find and interview a member of a culture different than your own. You can either interview someone in person (Darton has a lot of wonderful international students), interview someone from Second Life, OR join a cultural group from Yahoo Groups. You will be required to ask them a minimum of 20 questions. You can ask about almost anything that helps you understand their culture better, such as how they

spend their free time, traditions, their education system, etc. Please remember to use simple English in your communication if you are actually communicating with someone who speaks English as a second language. Once you have completed your interview, review your notes/e-mails and pick out the most interesting/important facts that you learned about the new culture. You will then give a 4-6 minute informative presentation (including the use of a visual aid) regarding what you learned from this cultural experience. You should submit your speech in written format and also include the transcripts from your interview or a copy of all of your e-mail correspondences. This speech will be videotaped in front of five audience members and sent to the instructor. See the grade sheet for more information.

Speech #4: Group Informative Speech Project

The class will be divided into groups to complete this speech. As a group, you will research a new culture. Most cultures are extremely complex and dynamic, so after completing your initial research, you will need to choose a specific cultural dynamic within the culture to focus on. Such a dynamic could include rituals (e.g., weddings or funerals), nonverbal artifacts (e.g. clothing styles), and/or meal traditions. The group will create a voice-over Power Point presentation to present their research. All members of the group will be required to have a speaking role in the presentation. See the grade sheet for more information.

Exams & Quizzes

Exams:

There will be ONE (1) required online exam for this course (a final). The exam may include true/false, short answer, multiple choice, matching, and essay questions. I want to see that you can remember the concepts and theories that you have learned and can apply them. The exam will be comprehensive and will include lecture material, reading assignments, information included in other handouts, and concepts included in classroom activities. The exam will be taken through WebCT and will be open-note and open book, but will have a specific time-limit.

Quizzes:

There will be 9 online quizzes posted to WebCT. The quiz due dates are posted on the course schedule and should be completed at some point during the week that each is due. For example, you have the entire first full week of classes to complete The Orientation Quiz and Quiz #1. Quizzes are worth 5 points each.

Papers

Journal Entries

You will be asked to complete several journal entries throughout the semester. The questions will ask you to think critically about the concepts we have discussed in class and concepts covered in the book. Some journal entries will only test your knowledge of the material and other entries will ask you to apply the knowledge you have gained. Some journal entries will ask you to reflect on your experiences in Second Life and in the class. Completing journal entries will give you the opportunity to ask me questions, improve your writing skills, and for you to communicate with me privately. I will be the only one to read your journals.

Participation

Discussion Forum Participation

Participation in the Discussion Forum consists of responding to discussion questions posted under “Discussion Forum.” You will earn one point for each academically based question you post and two points for each thoughtful response to an academic question. Your response should be a continuation of the conversation, so please read previous postings before responding. Upon completion of your 20 required points, you will be able to earn up to 20 points of extra credit based on your discussion forum participation. You will be able to build a positive online classroom environment by communicating with your classmates and instructor.

Second Life Participation

You will earn points for participating in social activities, scavenger hunts, classroom activities, etc. in Second Life. These points are not just awarded based on attendance, but on being a part of the activities and communicating with your classmates and instructor and Second Life members.

Point Distribution

The assignments for this course will be assigned the following points:

Speech of Introduction	40 points
Narrative Speech	50 points
Cultural Interview Speech	70 points
Group Informative OR Meal Traditions Speech	90 points
Quizzes	45 points
Journal Entries	75 points
Discussion Forum Participation	20 points
Second Life Participation	60 points
Final Exam	50 points
Total =	500 points

Grading Scale

Your grade for the course will be based on the following scale:

90-100%	450+ pts.	A
80-89%	400 - 449 pts.	B
70-79%	350 - 399 pts.	C
60-69%	300 - 349 pts.	D
0-59%	0 - 299 pts.	F

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

- Prior to every videotaped speech and at the end of every speech you should scan your audience with the video camera to record the number of audience members present. You need to have a minimum of 5 audience members for each speech.
- Assignments must be **RECEIVED** on the due dates listed on the course calendar.

They can either be dropped off at the Humanities Division office (F-101) OR mailed to:

Darton College
2400 Gillionville Rd.
Attn: Humanities Division – Alycia Ehlert
Albany, GA 31707

- It is your responsibility if you decide to send tapes via the mail that they are RECEIVED on the due date (NOT sent on the due date). Tapes sent via the mail must be postmarked two days prior to the due date or they will be counted late.
- If you are having WebCT problems, please call the WebHelp Desk by phone.
- If you have questions about course content, please feel free to contact me (Alycia Ehlert) at (229) 317-6953 OR email me at alycia.ehlert@darton.edu OR email me through WebCT.

Appendix G – Course Schedule

COMM 1000 * CULTURAL DIVERSITY * FALL 2009 (ONLINE) COURSE SCHEDULE					
WEEK	ASSIGNMENTS (Due on THURSDAYS by 5 p.m.,)	LEARNING MODULE	BOOK CHAPTER <i>Among Cultures</i>	BOOK CHAPTER <i>Experiencing Intercultural Communication</i>	SECOND LIFE EVENTS
Aug. 14 – 23	DUE August 20 Course Orientation Quiz	Course Orientation			
Aug. 24 – 30	DUE August 27 Introduction to Culture Quiz Public Speaking in a Nutshell Quiz Journal Entry #1 Digital Photograph SELF-INTRODUCTION SPEECH	Introduction to Culture Public Speaking in a Nutshell	Chapter 1 Chapter 2	Chapter 1 Chapter 2	Social Mixer 8/25 8 p.m. EST http://slurl.com/secondlife/ISTE%20Island%202/175/161/23
Aug. 31 – Sept. 6	DUE September 3 <i>Labor Day 9/7 – No Class 9/5-9/7</i> Culture and Identity Quiz Learning Culture Quiz Journal Entry #2	Culture and Self- Identity Learning Culture	Chapter 3 Chapter 4	Chapter 3 Chapter 4	Scavenger Hunt
Sept. 7 – 13	DUE September 10 <i>Labor Day 9/7 – No Class 9/5-9/7</i> Verbal Misunderstandings Quiz Journal Entry #3 NARRATIVE SPEECH <i>9/10: Last day to drop A-term classes without academic penalty</i>	Verbal Misunderstandings	Chapter 5	Chapter 5	Interview Second Life Member
Sept. 14 – 20	DUE September 17 Nonverbal Misunderstandings Quiz Journal Entry #4 CULTURAL INTERVIEW SPEECH	Nonverbal Misunderstandings	Chapter 6	Chapter 6	Social Mixer 9/15 9 p.m. EST (location TBA)
Sept. 21 – 27	DUE September 24 Group Project Outline Approval People Treated Poorly Quiz Journal Entry #5	Why People Get Treated Poorly Intercultural Conflict	Chapter 7 Chapter 8	Chapter 7 Chapter 8 Chapter 9 Chapter 11 Chapter 13	Field Trip 9/24 7 p.m. EST (location TBA)
Sept. 28 – Oct. 4	DUE October 1 Tips For Traveling Quiz Journal Entry #6 GROUP INFORMATIVE SPEECH	Tips For Traveling	Chapter 9	Chapter 10 Chapter 12	Group Informative Speech and Party 10/1 8 p.m. EST (location TBA)

Oct. 5 – 7	<u>DUE October 7 (WEDNESDAY)</u> Journal Entry #7 <i>FINAL EXAM (due 10/7, 5 p.m.)</i>	Review for and take Final			
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*Dates and times for Second Life events are subject to change based on schedules of professor or students.

Appendix H – Online Course Scavenger Hunt

CULTURAL DIVERSITY ONLINE COURSE SCAVENGER HUNT

To ensure that my students are familiar with how to locate important information within our virtual classroom (WebCT), the answers to several of the course orientation quiz questions will need to be found within the course content. The following questions may be asked (this means you will need to find the answers to these questions BEFORE starting the course orientation quiz):

- 1) What days of the week are my office hours? Hint: this answer can be found in the "course syllabus" section.
- 2) How many total points will the course be worth? Hint: this answer can be found in the "course syllabus" section.
- 3) During which week will the midterm exam be available? Hint: this answer can be found in the "course schedule" section.
- 4) What is the topic of the last lecture of the semester? Hint: this answer can be found in the "course schedule" section.
- 5) How many learning modules will be covered in the class? Hint: this answer can be found in the "learning modules" section.
- 6) What are the two different file formats offered for some of the power points lectures? Hint: this answer can be found in the "learning modules" section.
- 7) In addition to the speeches, evaluations/reports, and journals, what information can be found under the "assignments" section?
- 8) What is the time limit for the Cultural Narrative speech? Hint: this answer can be found in the "assignments" section.
- 9) What is the phone number for WebHelp Desk? Hint: this answer can be found in the "help" section.
- 10) Under which tool are you able to “send a chat invitation” to your classmates Hint: this answer can be found on the toolbar at the top of your screen.

Appendix I – Letter Requesting Course/Research Participation

Dear Students,

Thank you for enrolling in COMM 1000, Cultural Diversity in Communication, with Alycia Ehlert. This course is offered during the fall 2009 a-term semester.

I am writing to inform you about the requirements for this class. This is an online Cultural Diversity class, which requires “in-class” time as well as time spent doing homework and reading assignments. Additionally, this course requires active participation in activities and assignments within Second Life. You can learn more about Second Life at

<http://secondlife.com/whatis/>.

Within the course, I will be conducting a research study through the University of Georgia to explore how online students experience the culture of a college if they are not on campus. So, those enrolled in the course also agree to participate in the study. I will forward an informed consent form to those in the class detailing the rights of participants and any risks associated with the study involving them. I am pleased to work with anyone not interested in being involved in the study or a course involving Second Life to find a parallel course to this one. In addition to meeting the requirements of the course, I will ask several students to engage in a 45-minute interview at the end of the semester.

If you are interested in this course, you must prepare for the class by checking on a few items. Second Life requires extra system requirements for your computer (<http://secondlife.com/support/sysreqs.php>). Please review these requirements and decide if your computer can handle the requirements placed on it by the Second Life platform. If it does not and you still want to complete this course, update your computer to meet the minimum system requirements. You can contact Darton College’s computer helpdesk at webhelp@darton.edu if you have questions about how to update your computer. Once updated, please download Second Life (<https://join.secondlife.com/>) and begin to explore the Second Life world. Email me with questions you have about Second Life and I will do my best to answer your questions or refer you to someone who can.

Thank you for your assistance in my doctoral research. I look forward to an exciting semester!

Sincerely,

Alycia M. Ehlert
Interim Dean of Humanities
Assistant Professor of Speech Communication
Darton College
2400 Gillionville Rd.
Albany, GA 31707
Phone: (229) 317-6953
Email: alycia.ehlert@darton.edu

Appendix J – Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study titled “Community-Building and Collegiate Culture in Online Education: Second Life as an Educational Tool”, which is being conducted by Alycia Ehlert, Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, 229-317-6953, under the direction of Dr. J. Douglas Toma, Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, 706-542-4836. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of the study is to explore how virtual and online communities, if at all, help online students to experience the college culture of an institution if they are not on campus. This research is meant to connect online education to research about student engagement, which says that students do better in classes when they feel connected to their peers and to the college as a whole.

The benefits I may expect from this study are that I may get to know my peers in the online COMM 1000 course more completely and feel more connected to the college. I may also see an improvement in future online classes I take based on the results of this study. Your participation will help instructors and administration develop better online/distance education courses to meet students' educational needs, both at Darton College and nationally and internationally.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- Read the consent form and ask questions about your participation
- Sign the consent form and submit to the researcher
- Enroll in Alycia Ehlert’s COMM 1000: Cultural Diversity in Communication course during the fall 2009 A-term semester, which will last 7 ½ weeks, beginning August 14, 2009
- Read the course syllabus and ask questions about activities and assignments
- Download Second Life and develop an avatar to be used in classroom activities
- Participate in online activities and assignments in WebCT and Second Life
- Write journal entries reflecting on your online class experiences
- Complete course requirements as outlined in the syllabus
- Schedule a 45-minute time period with the researcher to discuss your online learning experiences
- Answer questions during the interview and allow this interview to be audio taped
- Provide basic demographic information and contact information
- Reply to follow-up emails and/or phone calls about your interview questions, if you would like to continue participation

No discomforts or stresses are expected.

No risks are expected. Ms. Ehlert will guarantee privacy and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

Ms. Ehlert will tape record my interview. Only the principal investigator (Dr. J. Douglas Toma) and the co-investigator (Ms. Alycia Ehlert) will have access to my taped interview, transcript and journal entries completed during the class sessions. These materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Ms. Ehlert's office. Ms. Ehlert will destroy recordings and any master list linking pseudonyms to participant identities within 90 days following completion of the research study. I have the right to review and correct the transcript of my interview up until the 90 days following the completion of the research study when my tape will be destroyed.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 229-317-6953. Additionally the researcher will

- Answer all questions I may have about this project
- Develop a syllabus about the class and upload to WebCT
- Answer questions about Second Life or refer me to someone in Instructional Technology who can answer my questions
- Supervise activities and assignments in WebCT and Second Life
- Collect my journal entries to help inform our future discussions, activities, and assignments
- Grade activities and assignments and provide feedback to me
- Assign me a pseudonym to help with maintaining the confidentiality of my records
- Schedule a 45-minute time period with me to discuss my online learning experiences
- Audio record my interview
- Label interview tapes using a pseudonym, or made up name, assigned to me
- Type the transcript of our interview using the same pseudonym
- Email or call me to check the information I gathered for accuracy
- Quote me in the research paper using the pseudonym assigned to me
- Erase any interview tapes and destroy any master list linking pseudonyms to participant identities within 90 days after the completion of the research project.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to:
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center,
Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

Appendix K – Second Life Quickstart Guide



SECOND LIFE

Quickstart Guide

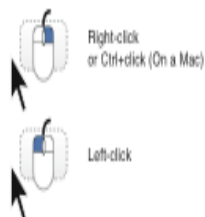
Welcome to your Second Life! This guide will help you get started fast, by explaining how to complete some of the most common tasks you'll need to get the most out of your new Second Life. It might be helpful to print this guide for reference as you explore the World.

Mouse

You'll use a mouse to click buttons, make selections, and interact with the Second Life Viewer interface.



Symbols used in this guide



Keyboard

You'll use a keyboard to participate in text chats, IMs, for searching, and more. Lots of common tasks are easier once you learn keyboard shortcuts.



Symbols used in this guide



Mic/Headset

If you have a microphone and headphones (or speakers), you can participate in real-time voice conversations with other users.



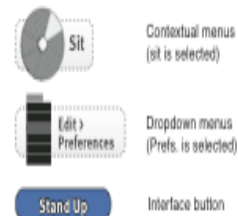
For help setting up your mic and headset, see Panel 8.

Viewer Interface

This Quickstart Guide will teach you how to find and use the most important tools in the Second Life Viewer software.



Symbols used in this guide



1 Viewer interface overview

To access most of the features, tools and options in the Second Life Viewer, you'll want to get comfortable finding your way around both the Top Menu Bar and the Bottom Toolbar.

Top Menu Bar: File, Edit, View, World, Tools, Help, Orientation Island 130, 120, 26 (Mature), 7:21 PM PST, L\$ 2500, Search

Bottom Toolbar: Local Chat, Communicate, Fly, Snapshot, Search, Build, Map, Mini-Map, Inventory

Callouts: Current Location, Purchase L\$, L\$ Balance, Access Local Chat history, Local Chat input, Gestures, Media Controls, Voice Chat Controls, Show/Hide Local Chat, Open Friends list, Start Flying, Open Search Window, Find People Nearby, Manage Your Stuff

2 Viewer contextual menus

As you explore the world of Second Life, you'll encounter both people and objects to interact with. Many common actions and tools are accessed through contextual menus, which appear when you right-click on objects, yourself, or other users.

Object: Sit Here, Create, Open, Edit, More, Pay, Take, Touch. Includes callouts: 'Interact with objects you encounter, such as buttons and links', 'Put the selected object away in your inventory', 'Give money, usually to purchase the selected object', 'Many objects you receive will be boxes containing other objects - open them to see their contents', 'See your Friends list', 'Opens Gestures palette to see all available animations'.

Self: Go, Groups, Profile, Appearance, Gestures, Take Off, Stand Up, Friends. Includes callouts: 'See a list of groups you're a member of', 'View and edit your profile', 'Make changes to your physical appearance', 'Remove individual pieces of clothing and accessories'.

Others: Go To, Mute, Profile, Send IM, More, Pay, Add Friend. Includes callouts: 'Hides the messages of someone bothering you in Local Chat so you can ignore them', 'See the selected user's profile', 'Send an IM to the selected user', 'Give a specified amount of L\$ to the user', 'Ask the selected user for permission to add them to your Friends list'.

3 Moving

In Second Life, your avatar can walk, run, and even fly. If you prefer, you can also use an onscreen control panel to move around.

Walk: Walk forward, Turn left, Turn right, Walk back. Includes callout: 'To access the onscreen movement control panel: View > Movement Controls'.

Sit: Sit, Stand Up. Includes callout: 'When sitting, you must click Stand Up before you can move again or fly'.

Fly: Fly, Stop Flying, Page Up, Page Down. Includes callouts: 'Click Fly to begin flying, and Stop Flying to stop flying', 'Page Up and Page Down keys allow you to adjust your altitude and land comfortably'.

4 Seeing

By default, you'll see Second Life from just behind your avatar, but you can move and turn the camera around to look at whatever you like - including yourself.

Camera Movement: alt + arrow keys (left, right, up, down) to move camera; Turn camera left/right; Zoom in/out; Rotate camera in all directions; Move camera in all directions.

Focus: alt + click to focus camera on a new point.

Reset: Esc to return camera to its position directly behind you.

Access Panel: View > Camera Controls.

5 Appearance

In Second Life, you can look like - and wear - anything you want. Edit your Appearance to adjust your physical features and body, and select clothing, outfits and costumes to wear from your Inventory. You can customize your appearance however you like, or buy pre-designed avatars and outfits that other Residents have made.

Inventory: Clothing, New Shirt (worn), Suit Jacket, Blue Jeans, Hiking Boots. Includes callouts: 'Right-click an item in Inventory and choose Wear to put it on', 'Manage your clothing and avatars through the Inventory'.

Avatars: Three different avatars shown. Includes callouts: 'Free and paid avatars and outfits are available in stores. To purchase, you'll need Linden Dollars, which can be bought by clicking L\$ at the right of the Top Menu Bar', 'To see a wide selection of items to purchase, visit XStreetSL.com'.

6 Local chat & voice

Express yourself! You can talk to the people around you through text-based Local Chat. If you have a microphone, you can also speak out loud using inworld voice.

Access Local Chat history

Local Chat input

Voice enabled

Active Voice

Show/hide Local Chat controls

Press Talk to use voice. Choose the lock to keep voice on

Mini-Map

Inventory

7 IMs & voice calls

Want to have a private conversation? Use instant messages or voice calls to talk to other users, no matter where they are in Second Life.

friend

Send IM

Multiple IMs appear as tabs along bottom

Start a voice call

Enter message and press send

Send

Contacts Local Chat Wendy Borma Pedro Rolino

Current tab highlighted

Unread IM in flashing tab

You can also IM users who aren't nearby from your Friends list.

8 Set up for voice chat

Tired of typing? To use the Voice features in Second Life, you'll need to set up your microphone and headset. Just follow these simple steps, and you'll be talking in no time.

- Connect your microphone or headset via audio-in or USB
- Open the Viewer preferences
- Click Voice Chat
- Make sure Enable voice chat is checked
- Click Device Settings, then change both the input and output devices to your preferred microphone and speakers
- If your mic is working, you will see green bars in the input level monitor
- Click OK - when you start talking, you'll see the voice indicator over your avatar's head (see 6: Local chat & voice)

Preferences

General

Input & Camera

Network

Web

Graphics

Audio & Video

Text Chat

Voice Chat

Communication

Popups

Skins

Device Settings

NOTE: Running the Device Settings will temporarily disconnect you from Voice Chat.

About Help OK Cancel Apply

Voice Chat Device Settings

Audio Devices

Input device (microphone): Default

Output device (speakers): Default

Input Level

Adjust the slider to control...

9 Make friends

Second Life is a lot more fun when you have friends to explore it with. When you meet interesting people, you can ask for permission to add them to your Friends list. Then, use the Friends list to see which friends are online, send them messages, view their profiles and more.

friend

you

Add Friend

Friends

Friends list

Online friends appear in bold

IM/Call

Send an IM

Profile

View a friend's profile

Teleport

Invite a friend to your current location

Pay

Give a friend L\$

Remove

Add

Remove/Add friends

10 Location

The world of Second Life is gigantic, and getting bigger every day. If you want to visit a specific location, you can search for it on the Map. You can create and save Landmarks - bookmarks that will bring you back to specific locations. Use Landmarks to save time, and jump straight to your favorite places!

Build

Map

Mini-Map

Use the Map to find a specific location

To create a landmark you can return to later:

World > Create Landmark Here

To return to Landmarks you've created, open your Inventory and double-click on any item in the Landmarks folder.

World Map

Objects Terrain

Person

Infohead

Telehub

Landmarks

Brightonia

Bright Beach

Teleport

Copy SLURL to clipboard

Find the locations of your online friends

Find your previously created landmarks

Search for new locations, people, and events

Instantly Teleport to a specific location

Create a SLURL to the selected location

Teleport

You can Teleport to get from one location to another quickly. To invite a friend to your location, open your Friends list, and click **Teleport**.

SLurl

(Second Life URL)

You can use SLurl to teleport to new locations. A SLurl is a web-based link to a location in Second Life. If you click a SLurl with Second Life open on your computer, you can immediately teleport to that location.

11 Help

There's a lot to learn in Second Life, but you're never alone. If you have questions, need advice, or don't know what to do, help is always waiting for you. Visit the Support Portal at secondlife.com/support to get help now!

Support Portal
At secondlife.com/support, you will have access to the Knowledge Base, tickets, and Billing Support

Knowledge Base
Find help videos and information on your avatar, Linden Dollars and more

Live Chat
Premium members have access to Live Chat support in Second Life

Support Tickets
If you can't find the help you need in the Knowledge Base, you can submit a ticket to the Second Life Support Staff

Billing Support
If you have a non-technical issue with your account, you can call the Billing Team toll free 24/7

12 What next?

Second Life is packed with interesting things to do, people to meet and places to explore. If you're not sure what to do next, or want to see what's new, you have lots of options.

To find new activities, events and places to explore, visit: secondlife.com/showcase

Talk to other users in Second Life whenever you have questions

Use the Search feature to search all of Second Life

The Showcase tab displays interesting places and things going on in Second Life

Narrow your search results using the tabs at the top of the search window to specifically search for events, places, people and more

Appendix: Keyboard Shortcuts

Movement

Guide your avatar's movements in Second Life.

- Walk forward: **W** or **↑**
- Walk backward: **S** or **↓**
- Turn left: **A** or **←**
- Turn right: **D** or **→**
- Run: Double-tap **W** **S** or **↑** **↓**
- Always run: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **R**
- Jump: **E** (Tap once)
- Toggle flying: **Home**
- Fly up: Hold **E** or hold **↑** **Ctrl/Cmd**
- Fly down: Hold **C** or hold **↓** **Ctrl/Cmd**

View

Control your camera view and perspective in Second Life.

- Mouselook: **M**
- Reset View: **Esc**
- Look at: Hold **Alt** and click mouse to recenter
- Zoom-in: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **0**
- Zoom-default: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **g**
- Zoom-out: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **B**
- Toggle fullscreen: **Alt/Opt** + **Enter**

Communicate

Access and participate in text-based Local Chat and Instant Messages with other users.

- Show chat bar: **I** (if not displayed)
- Hide chat bar: **Esc** (if displayed)
- Friends: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Shift** + **F**
- Toggle between Friends and Groups Tabs with **Alt/Opt** + **←** **→**
- Local chat: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **H**
- Communicate: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **T**
- Look at last speaker: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **↓**
- Gestures: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **G**

System

Basic system-wide functions that work in Second Life.

- Undo: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Z**
- Redo: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Y**
- Cut: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **X**
- Copy: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **C**
- Paste: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **V**
- Duplicate: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **D**
- Select all: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **A**
- Deselect: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **E**
- Close window: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **W**
- Close all windows: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Shift** + **W**

General

Quick access to useful Second Life resources, interfaces and tools.

- Preferences: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **P**
- Help: **F1**
- Search: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **F**
- World map: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **M**
- Mini-map: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Shift** + **M**
- Teleport home: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Shift** + **H**
- Inventory: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **I**
- Build: **B**
- Upload image: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **U**
- Take snapshot: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Shift** + **S**
- Snapshot to disk: **Ctrl** + **.**
- Quit Second Life: **Ctrl/Cmd** + **Q**

Key:

- Ctrl/Cmd** = **Ctrl** on a PC; **Command** on a Mac
- Alt/Opt** = **Alt** on a PC; **Option** on a Mac

Appendix L – Student Information Form

Directions: Please provide the professor with the following information. You are not required to give demographic information, though it is appreciated. This information is used for the professor's dissertation research. You may send this information as an attachment to an email message, in the body of an email message, or in your private journal entry discussion board area.

Contact Information

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Alternate email address:

Second Life Name:

Demographic Information

Age:

Gender:

Marital Status:

Race:

Nationality:

Educational background (i.e., previous degrees held, year in school):

Number of online classes taken:

Which online classes taken:

Schedule

What courses are you currently taking?

What days and times do they meet?

What is your work schedule (dates and times)?

Does your work schedule change on a weekly basis?

Based on the current course schedule, what conflicts do you have with Second Life Events?

Course Expectations

Why are you taking this class?

What do you hope to get out of this class?

What is your biggest concern about this class?

Have you ever used Second Life? If so, for how long?

Appendix M – 8/25 Journal Entry: Our first Second Life Social Mixer

I sent requests for student information through several forms: email, discussion forum, and announcements. This included the students' SL names. I received 5/11 responses before the mixer. I logged into WebCT about 15 minutes prior to the start and brought up the class schedule with the SLurl for our meeting location. The link didn't appear to work at first, though it finally loaded. I dropped into the Second Life world on top of someone. We exchanged hellos while we waited for others. Three more appeared who were on my class roster, then a fifth who I didn't have information on. I added them all as friends and suggested they do the same.

After several exclamations from students that this was weird, and reports on funny things that had happened, including some students accidentally stripping their avatars, I suggested we move to the coffee-house nearby where I had originally planned to meet. We all awkwardly stood around trying to figure out the chat and talk modes of communication. It was frustrating to learn that only half of us could speak, and some couldn't hear what we said, so the entire mixer had to be typed. I tried my best to answer questions about SL functions. We also discussed the upcoming speech, our next journal entry assignment, where we would meet next time, why we were using SL and I offered to set up a regular meet time in SL where I could answer questions and we could talk. Some students seemed very interested in SL as a tool; most students were confused. I reassured everyone that we would figure SL out together and requested their patience and persistence. They all agreed to try it out.

Overall, I think it was a good opportunity to test a new technology and figure out some glitches, as well as learn about the students and class. I would change this by bringing technical support to answer questions about how SL works to get a brief tutorial for everyone. I would also request all students set up a microphone and speakers.

Appendix N – Email Follow-up After Students Missed Second Life Social Mixer

Subject: Oh no!
From: Alycia Ehlert

Sent: September 16, 2009 2:56 PM
To: Undisclosed recipients
CC:
BCC:

I missed y'all at our Second Life mixer last night. Second Life activities account for 60 points of your grade. All you have to do is participate! More importantly, these activities give you time to talk with your peers and discuss course content, ask questions, learn from one another and from me, and to continue to get to know one another, which will really help when you begin working on your group project.

So here are a few reminders:

1. Your cultural interview speech is due tomorrow. Please follow the directions under "assignments" and then speeches. Y'all have been doing well on speeches so far, though try not to read directly from your notes. Your goal is to sound conversational.
2. We have a Second Life field trip scheduled on Thurs. 9/24 at 7 p.m. EST. I've been scouting locations, but I'm still willing to take suggestions. I'll let you know the location soon.
3. I have been out sick so I haven't graded your narrative speeches yet, but I am working on them. I'll post the grade soon and send you specific feedback about your intro and narrative speeches.
4. To help with your discussion forum and Second Life participation points (which add to 60 total points) I'm asking that you schedule a 45-60 minute interview to discuss your experiences with Second Life. I'll award you 30 points for scheduling and following through with the interview. Interviews can be over the phone, in person, or using the chat function in Second Life. I explained this interview under the course orientation if you would like more information. Contact me with dates and times that work (preferably at the end or right after the end of our semester) as soon as possible.
5. I have posted details for your group speech (under assignments and then speeches). You'll split off into groups of 2 or 3 to complete this assignment. Start talking now about which group you'd like to be in. The best location for this discussion is under the discussion forum. The goal is to deliver these speeches in Second Life on Oct. 1st at 8 p.m. EST.

Please let me know how you are doing and whether or not I can help with anything!

Alycia

Appendix O – Email Sent About Second Life Field Trip

Subject: Second Life Field Trip
From: Alycia Ehlert

Sent: September 23, 2009 11:15 AM
To: Undisclosed recipients
CC:
BCC:

Good morning,

We have a Second Life field trip scheduled for tomorrow, Thursday, Sept. 24, at 7 p.m. EST. We're going to tour the Smithsonian Latino Museum available at <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Smithsonian%20Latino%20Lobby/128/120/21>. If you are unable to follow this link, log into Second Life, then go to search, then click the Showcase tab, then click Arts & Culture, then on Smithsonian Latino Museum. A short description of the location will appear on the left. Click teleport to go to the museum.

We'll tour the museum and I'll answer questions you have about the upcoming group speech.

Please note that you have been assigned to groups. Please start communicating with your group members!

See you tomorrow!

Alycia