Second Life at Athabasca University

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Second Life at AU

- AU ad hoc group first met in March, 2007
- Wide representation from various departments and centres
  - Psychology, Centre for Distance Education, School of Business, Educational Media Development, Institutional Studies, AU Student Union
- SB purchased an “island” soon after
  - US$980 (65,536m²)
  - maintenance fee US$150/month
- Developed by AU volunteers
AU Context

- Primarily undergraduate, individualized study
  - start at any time, proceed at own pace
- Only 20% program students
- Formal learning and collaboration are difficult
- Some evidence that students are resistant to interaction when it interferes with ability to self-pace
Learning at a Distance

Athabasca University delivers distance education to students around the world. We are an open university with a wide range of excellent courses and programs. We offer you flexibility in your studies to suit your schedule.

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Chat Agents

- Conversational or Chat agents are programs that converse with the user using natural language rules and symbols.
- Advances in chat agent performance have increased the potential of this technology and its application in field of education (Kerly, Hall, & Bull, 2006)
- Historical figure applications (Heller & Procter, 2007)
Chat Agents & Second Life

- In SL, chat agents can be assigned to avatars becoming ‘embodied’ and closer to what Cassels (2004) refers to as an Embodied Conversational Agent.

- Avatar chat agents can also be scripted to interact with the user in various pedagogical contexts thus becoming closer to what Lester (2000) refers to as an Animated Pedagogical Agent.
Famous Psychologists on AU Island

- Freudbot & Piagetbot: chatbots programmed to converse in the first person on topics related to life and work of Freud and Piaget
- Topics are organized as short narratives with multiple entry and exit points
- Uses conversational rules to switch or progress through topics
Famous Psychologists on AU Island

- Second Life provides animation + 3D immersive environment for Freudbot & Piagetbot
- Preliminary work has been positive

Using SL scripts, avatar agents can collect and store information about avatars, detect them, move towards them, and initiate conversations using the chat technology
[7:13] Freudbot Voom: Hello. My name is Sigmund Freud. What would you like to talk about?
[7:13] You: who are you
[7:13] Freudbot Voom: I am Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis and a major proponent of the unconscious as a psychological force.
[7:13] You: really
[7:13] Freudbot Voom: Indeed. Shall we continue?
[7:13] You: sure
[7:13] Freudbot Voom: I started my career in 1886 as a neurologist in private practice and primarily treated cases of hysteria. I eventually developed my own techniques involving free association and dream analysis to uncover clues about the origin of psychological problems and ways of treating them.
[7:14] You: what is free association
[7:14] Freudbot Voom: Free association is a psychotherapeutic technique that I developed to uncover the contents of the unconscious mind by having the patient speak without constraints and encouraging them to explore and go beyond the boundaries of the normal recollection.
[7:14] You: tell me more
[7:14] Freudbot Voom: In free association, patients are asked to lie on a couch with their eyes closed and to recall the episode in which they first experienced the symptoms of hysteria. If you would like to see a picture of my couch, click here.
[7:14] You: does it work
[7:14] Freudbot Voom: Have you ever been psychoanalyzed?
[7:14] You: no
[7:14] Freudbot Voom: Psychoanalysis is very expensive and time consuming.
AU Library in SL

- Virtual Gallery
  - AU Library has a number of collections
  - The SL gallery reproduces the experience of walking through a gallery in RL
  - Different multimedia can be added to enhance the gallery (mp3, video)
  - Metadata for the images can be displayed on info cards
Title: Roos
Photographer: Albert Karranen
Description: Wood Noon looks at camera with grass in mouth and ears and shrubs in the background.
Location: Northern Alberta, Canada

Title: Scenic Mountain
Photographer: Albert Karranen
Description: Tall sharp mountain peaks with dark clouds in the background.
Location: Tombstone Mountain, Yukon, Canada
AU Library in SL

- Information Skills (possible future development)
  - AU Library is working with the Open University (UK) Library to enhance an Information skills tutorial (SAFARI)
  - A tour (with activities) through different aspects of information skills
  - Content could be adapted to be more suitable for SL
Site Open to Public

- Please join us in-world after the presentation

http://slurl.com/secondlife/Athabasca%20University/133/134/27/
Implications for SL

- Informal social networking functions in SL that encourage/require synchronous participation
  - Convocation
  - Meet Your Tutor nights
- Information dissemination
  - AU Library information literacy project
Implications (cont.)

- One component of a graduate level course
  - role playing: gender and race reversal
  - grad research re. Sloodle tie-in

- Simulations
  - individual exploration of a historical event or place
Future Plans

- Go slow; no large research grant applications
- Development should be on a pilot basis, researched for user acceptance
- Monitor AU projects in other immersive environments (Sun Darkstar/CSIS)
Additional Resources

- New Media Consortium
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9VZKTT6gZ8

- Educational Uses of SL
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOFU9oUF2HA

- SJSU SLIS Second Life Campus:

- Alliance Library Second Live One-Year BDay
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MazAoWCKPU
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