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Title	Virtual Worlds at QUT: exploring ways to engage students - whatever you can imagine
Authors	Newman, C and Bland, D
Type	Conference or Workshop Item
URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/17048/
Published Date	2011

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Paper 110 – Pecha Kucha

Virtual Worlds at QUT: Exploring ways to engage students - whatever you can imagine

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Abstract

This Pecha Kucha will demonstrate innovative learning and assessment practices of a community of educators at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) using the virtual world of Second Life in the disciplines of Design, Architecture, Law and Education.

Since the launch of Second Life in 2003, 3D Virtual Worlds have been at the experimental edge of education in the tertiary sector. QUT has established an island in Second Life to enable educational innovators to investigate its application to their own disciplines.

Many educators keen to pursue innovative teaching methods explore the medium because of its versatility and diverse applications. The presentation will introduce examples of the creative use of Second Life environments and features applied to varied teaching and learning situations and will show how this platform enhances student engagement and collaboration with industry partners.

The 3D virtual environment of Second Life makes possible assessable projects that are more ambitious than usually imaginable in a university setting to engage and excite students. For example, Design students work in collaboration to build a virtual space station drawing from connections with specialized professional organisations such as NASA.

The virtual environment enables explorative, creative play, unrestricted by space, money and time constraints, so that Architecture students are able to create virtual landscapes that can be quickly redesigned and modified, allowing for instant feedback on the benefits or disadvantages of their design.

In Education and Law, short animated scenarios created in Second Life act as ‘triggers’ for class discussion. Students catch a glimpse into specific aspects and issues in their future employment which are normally unavailable to them.

Each application demonstrates that virtual environments can provide engaging experiences in many forms and support learning in a diverse range of disciplines. Feedback from student surveys confirms this positive impact on learning and the student experience.