**Objectives and Outcomes**

This course is built upon L. Dee Fink’s *taxonomy of significant learning*, as applied to virtual worlds. Long after the course concludes, our hope is that:

- You understand the concept of a virtual world and are proficient at moving, communicating, and otherwise functioning in this environment.
- You understand the basic properties of virtual objects, and can construct and customize such objects of moderate complexity.
- You know the range of behaviors that virtual objects can manifest as agents, and can script such behaviors into these objects.
- You feel confident about your ability to explore a virtual world and its capabilities on your own, ranging from being a consumer of the virtual world (experiencing things, interacting with other avatars) to a producer within that world (creating and scripting objects, providing services).
- You recognize and appreciate how the psychological and technological issues in this course relate to society, our daily lives, and ourselves.
- You have some skills and tools for “leaving your comfort zone” and learning more about psychology and computer science on your own.
- You learn how to communicate and work effectively with colleagues from different disciplines.

**Materials and Texts**

- Assorted handouts, articles, and sample code to be distributed throughout the semester.
- *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson (any available edition or publisher).
- Accounts in Second Life and Google.

Additional information is also available on the web; do not hesitate to look for further sources of information regarding the concepts, techniques, tools, and paradigms that we will discuss.

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**Course Work and Grading**

Graded coursework consists of in-class exercises, 2 tests, 1 course blog/portfolio, and 1 project. Letter grades are determined as follows: 

- ≥ 90% gets an A– or better;
- ≥ 80% gets a B– or better;
- ≥ 70% gets a C– or better.

The instructors may curve grades upward based on qualitative considerations such as degree of difficulty, effort, class participation, time constraints, and overall attitude. Grades are never curved downward.

**In-Class Exercises**

In-class exercises will be assigned throughout the semester, about once per week. In-class exercises are where you can learn from your mistakes without grading penalty: if you do the work and submit it on time, you will get full credit, regardless of
correctness. What goes around comes around: the effort you put into the exercises pays off in the midterm, blog/portfolio, and database/3D exhibit. The exercise submission deadline is always the end of that class’s day. Submissions after the deadline receive half credit, period.

Tests
Exams are scheduled for October 7 and December 16. They are meant to assess foundational knowledge, and as such, questions may be content-oriented or forward-looking (i.e., “use this knowledge to resolve this situation”). You may neither solicit nor give help while an exam is in progress. Late and/or missed tests are handled on a case-to-case basis; in all instances, talk to us about them.

Course Blog/Portfolio
In-class work will be supplemented by assorted readings, reflections, and activities to be done in between sessions. These will be documented in http://lmu-virtual-fall-2010.blogspot.com. Blog entries will be graded based on their punctuality during the semester, then as an overall portfolio of work at the end of the semester.

Database and 3D Exhibit of Psychologically Beneficial Virtual World Applications
You will apply what you learn to create a database and 3D exhibit of psychologically beneficial virtual world applications, working in interdisciplinary teams to: (a) search virtual environments for such applications, (b) gather and present data about them, and (c) create a virtual exhibit about these applications with pertinent information, links, and illustrations. The exhibits will be graded based on their psychology content as well as their technical design and functionality. The group nature of this work will also involve self- and peer assessment. To facilitate the creation of these exhibits, groups may need to pay for uploads or other virtual services; the instructors view this cost as commensurate with or less than a typical textbook purchase. The project is due on December 9.

Attendance
Attendance at all class sessions (virtually or otherwise, as appropriate) is expected, but not absolutely required. Each week will include activities and presentations that will be difficult to make up. If you must miss one or more class sessions, it is your responsibility to keep up. The instructors should be notified as soon as possible, electronically or by phone, of the reasons for all absences. We will make arrangements to discuss make-up work. At the discretion of the instructors, excessive absences may result in a grade of incomplete (I).

Note that the last day to add or drop a class without a grade of W is September 3. The withdrawal or credit/no-credit status deadline is November 5.

University Policy on Academic Honesty
Loyola Marymount University expects high standards of honesty and integrity from all members of its community. All students are expected to follow the LMU honor code, as stated in the LMU Undergraduate Bulletin 2010-2011.

Americans with Disabilities Act
Students with special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act who need reasonable modifications, special assistance, or accommodations in this course should promptly direct their request to the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office. Any student who currently has a documented disability (physical, learning, or psychological) needing academic accommodations should contact DSS (Daum Hall, Room 224, x84535) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit http://www.lmu.edu/dss for additional information.

Course Schedule
Specifics may change as the course progresses; university dates (italicized) are less likely to change.

September Course overview, history of virtual worlds, basic skills
September 3 Last day to add or drop a class without a grade of W
October Building and scripting
October 7 Exam 1
November/December Virtual world psychology and culture: benefits and applications
November 5 Withdraw/credit/no-credit deadline
November 24–26 Thanksgiving; no class
December 9 Database and 3D exhibit due
December 16 Exam 2 (non-cumulative)