

2009-2010 Grant Proposals

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Virtual Learning in Second Life: A Communicative Approach to Foreign Language Teaching Classroom Innovation Grant

Project Description: This is a comparative pilot research project intended for use with an intermediate Spanish class to take place from January to May 2010. The project consists of using Second Life, a virtual reality online program to simulate a real-world Spanish-speaking environment. This program will function as a virtual Spanish laboratory. Students will meet in groups of 5 along with me and other Spanish teachers and assistants on a bi-weekly basis in the virtual lab. Students will be able to access the lab from their home or from a remote location with an internet connection.

Twenty five intermediate Spanish students will participate with the professor and other mentors to interact verbally and in writing. Students will perform exercises such as responding to media clips, simulated conversation, writing assignments, oral and listening activities, and review of class curriculum topics. There will also be an additional opportunity to ask questions or resolve doubts inside the virtual lab.

I will be teaching three courses of intermediate Spanish during the coming semester. This will provide me with the ability to use one class of 25 students as a control group to compare results among the three classes. Only students from the control group will be allowed to participate and enter the virtual laboratory. No outside Second Life users will be permitted on the virtual laboratory grounds. Since this is a research project involving the participation of students, if awarded the grant, I plan to obtain consent through the College's IRB to document and present the results of this project.

Since one of the goals of the department is for language use outside the classroom, this project will provide an opportunity for students to use Spanish outside the classroom while still being in a controlled and safe environment. Having students in the lab bi-weekly will also allow me to track and monitor student progress. The interaction outside of the classroom and in smaller groups will enhance student learning and participation and my assessment of student progress will be more efficient. I will evaluate the impact of this learning project by creating skill assessment rubrics that will facilitate measuring certain criteria of oral, aural, and written proficiency skills. I will also give students the opportunity to provide feedback on the effectiveness of instructional technologies such as Second Life in their learning.

Since this is a research/action project, my goal is to document my findings and compare the results in student performance at the end of the semester. I plan to present my findings at a department meeting during the semester and also share the experience with the larger academic community in a teaching round-table discussion or break-out session during academic development day. Ultimately I plan to present these findings at a professional conference for foreign language teaching.

The long-range plan for this project is to integrate the lab experience into the intermediate Spanish curriculum. This will increase communicative capabilities and promote the use of the language outside the classroom and among the different sections of intermediate Spanish. Second Life is an innovative program that is being used in many teaching and learning communities. Since the possibilities for teaching and learning in Second Life are infinite, there is a possibility of working with professors of other disciplines in Second Life, and to ultimately have a Stonehill College campus in Second Life, following the examples of the University of Texas, Ball State University, and Vassar College, among others. Please, see the information links below:

<http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/archives/SecondLife.html>

<http://www.vassar.edu/headlines/2007/what-is-second-life.html>

http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2007-08-01-second-life_N.htm

Budget:

\$420.00-Rent for virtual land (through May 2010)

\$10.00-Media player and accessories

\$20.00-Building for laboratory

\$100.00-General accessories (landscaping, furniture, setup, environment, etc.)

\$200.00- Start up money for student materials in Second Life (clothing, hair, etc.)

Since this is a continuing project which I hope to implement in upcoming intermediate Spanish courses, a plan is required to finance the program each semester. The money from the grant will allow me to set up and purchase a building, materials, etc. In the future I will need only to maintain the rent on the land and pay for student materials each semester. I will do this by charging a lab fee of \$20.00 per semester to each student participating in the project. In this way the future implementation of this technology will be financially feasible and not dependent on university funds. Alternative possibilities for funding include support from IT and the Foreign Languages Dept.