



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **PolyU opens new dimension for students**

In the new academic year, the faculty members at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) may interact with their students not just on the campus, but also via the virtual world of Second Life.

Across the PolyU campus, over 500 staff and students are already actively engaged in enhancing their learning and teaching experience on the Second Life platform through virtual tutorials and lectures, virtual assignments and placements.

PolyU is the first institution in Hong Kong to have an entire virtual campus in Second Life. The pioneering endeavour started with the idea of building a virtual hotel environment for the use of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM). The subsequent establishment of a virtual PolyU campus was made possible through support from the senior management and funding from the Educational Development Centre (EDC). A team of colleagues from the Departments of Applied Social Sciences (APSS), Computing (COMP), SHTM, School of Design, EDC and the Pao Yue-kong Library then collaborated to develop the currently used three islands in Second Life.

Project leaders Mr Paul Penfold (SHTM), Dr David Kurt Herold (APSS) and Dr Vincent Ng (COMP) are keen to have the continued development of PolyU in Second Life. As Mr Penfold put it, "Second Life enables students and educators to create innovative environments for distance learning, computer-supported cooperative work, simulations and teaching. This use of simulation in a safe environment will greatly enhance experiential learning."

Dr Herold echoed these sentiments based on his experiences in arranging virtual field trips for students of an Urban Studies course to the virtual cities of Moscow, New York, Dublin and Paris; and also for students of a Media Studies course to visit Media Corporations such as Reuters, CNN and Sky News. The visits were organized efficiently and without any financial involvement.

At the PolyU School of Design, students are using Second Life to try out different types of digital media including visual effects, character design and 3D modelling. At the same time, colleagues from COMP are using the platform to simulate business settings, thereby providing students with realistic interview practice. Students can access a wide variety of library materials and information about the library via the platform and links on the library's intranet for additional information.

The use of Second Life has enriched the curriculum of various courses of many disciplines and facilitated independent learning both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, Second Life is also providing colleagues with new tools for collaboration with other academics and researchers worldwide. Academics from the US, Japan, Australia, or the UK can give lectures to students at PolyU from their hometown. Students and staff can attend virtual lectures, conferences, and meetings with peers from around the world within the Second Life environment.

In September, the University will also play host to the Hong Kong chapter of the world's first 48-hour non-stop academic conference in Second Life. Officially known as SLActions 2009, the conference will span across different time zones around the globe, starting with Ghent University in Belgium, to universities in Hong Kong, Japan, Brazil and concluding at the University of California, Berkeley, US.

Second Life is an online platform developed by Linden Lab and its content is created by its "Residents". It is claimed that there are now over 16 million users worldwide, with a peak of some 88,200 concurrent users during 2009. Many universities around the world have created their own virtual campus in Second Life.



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PolyU staff and students can access a wide range of library materials via the virtual Pao Yue-kong Library



Virtual classrooms designed for part-time students of COMP



SHTM students made a field trip to a hotel in Turkey via Second Life

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