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PolyU's School of Hotel and Tourism Management take part in Virtual College Fair in Second Life

The virtual world of Second Life was the venue for an international college fair which attracted an estimated 9,000 -12,000 visitors over the week-long event from 16 to 21 November 2008. The School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) was pleased to take part in this innovative event.

The Virtual College Fair brought together 37 educational institutions from North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific to provide opportunities for prospective students to explore the many programmes on offer and get to know more about the institutions represented. Visitors to the fair came from many countries, with the majority from the United States, and significant numbers of attendees from the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan.

The first day consisted of virtual seminars given by representatives of some of the institutions, with the remainder of the weekend available for individual consultations with college representatives. Universities and colleges were able to create informational displays about their institutions and meet informally to talk with visitors. The organizers, University of Kentucky, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and Johnson & Wales University, said that attendance was strong throughout the fair period and their survey of participants indicated that, 'representatives appreciated the large display size, the quality of the displays created by each institution, the opportunity to "network" with other educators involved in Second Life, the presentations, and the support provided by fair organizers.'

Joining SHTM at the fair were other institutions such as Cornell University, Georgia State University, Ohio State University, University of Florida and the University of West Scotland. As an experiment in promoting "real" educational programmes in the virtual world, "it was definitely of value," said Mr Paul Penfold, Manager (Educational Development) of SHTM, "and something to consider repeating in the future, particularly in attracting overseas students to the university," he observed.

PolyU's School of Hotel and Tourism Management is a leading provider of hospitality education in the Asia-Pacific Region. It is ranked No. 4 among the world's top hotel and tourism schools based on research and scholarship, according to a study published in the *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* in 2005.

With 60 academic staff drawing from 18 countries, the School offers programmes at levels ranging from PhD to Higher Diploma. It was awarded the "2003 International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators Institutional Award" in recognition of its significant contribution to tourism education, and is the only training centre in the Education and Training Network in Asia recognised by the World Tourism Organization.



SHTM, PolyU exhibition booth in Second Life

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