

Clockwise from top left: Mindy Frisbee, Jonathon Richter, Vlad Slabin, Lynne Anderson, Mark Horney, Tom Layton – and their avatars

and meet someone nice, engage in the sorts of activities that get people pregnant in real life, and can even become pregnant in Second Life ... complete with requisite delivery of a baby avatar. Before he died, Kurt Vonnegut gave a lecture in Second Life (his avatar had a tiny trademark mustache), and recently rock songstress Suzanne Vega has performed and real-life literary agents held “how to get published” seminars.

## Second Life for Ducks?

So what does all of this have to do with the UO?

CATE has joined entertainment, educational and corporate content providers breaking ground with experimental Second Life ventures, including a host of universities, *Wired* magazine, the Chicago public school system and the Eugene-based International Society for Technology in Education.

Richter’s vision is to offer classes in Second Life, real classes for real university credit, for a student audience that will log on for an immersive experience in a foreign medium. A first step is this term’s graduate course in the School of Education’s Teacher Education division: “Emerging Technologies in Education.” The objective is to train future educators to identify “emerging trends in educational technology” and then “demonstrate they can apply what they know about emerging technologies to students, tools, and topics relevant to their teaching.”

Richter has designed a unique pedagogy structure that bridges real life and the virtual world, with half the lectures taught by him in a real classroom in the UO’s Knight Library and the other half within Second Life itself, taught by Richter’s online alter-ego, a sharply suited gargoyle with stained-glass skin known as Wainbrave Bernal.

Beyond teaching the teachers, Richter sees great promise in Second Life as a teaching tool. Why read what it’s like inside a volcano or the eye of a hurricane, he argues, when an educator can replicate the experience online? What might students learn about identity and diversity if



their online avatars wore an enforced, predetermined shell that made them look like everyone else in the class? The possibilities are boundless, Richter thinks.

Richter is given to bombastic discussions of the subject, rattling about new schema in educational philosophy and untested classroom strategies. He’s a tall guy, his former football player’s physique no impediment as he waves his arms and acts out esoteric concepts. Richter’s job may pay his bills and help feed and clothe his wife and children, but his life’s work is more complex, more basic: preaching the gospel of re-imagined educational paradigms and implementing strategies that will engender success in all learners.

“If I could work full-time in Second Life,” he says solemnly, “I would do it.”

The real-life CATE offices are located a couple of blocks east of the main universi-

ty campus, leaving its staffers cut off from the food at the student union or along 13th Avenue. So Richter and his colleagues have discovered their own college atmosphere in the Villard Street Pub, an upscale watering hole housed in the shell of what appears to be a retrofitted fast food chain restaurant. On Tuesday afternoons, Richter and a fellow CATE research associate named Mark Horney (avatar name Irving Gyllig) have a standing appointment to meet for shop talk over a couple of beers.

Horney is trying to hash out the details of how recreated Second Life environments might operate. “The examples I have been touting of late have all been historical examples,” he says between sips from his pint. “My examples are from history, but they don’t *have* to be from history.” In fact, nearly all of his examples *are* from history, and he rapidly toggles

among anecdotes involving Alexander Graham Bell, the Battle of Gettysburg, the Parthenon and a John Wayne film.

Richter patiently waits as his friend finishes each thought, nodding along as Horney’s overall themes begin coming together, then makes a quick observation about whether the Second Life format would support each idea.

The two men complement each other’s strengths, bolstering the other’s Second Life-related work projects. Richter’s thoughts are free-ranging, effervescent, floating around the bar like half-formed bubbles of possibility, pristine and untouched “maybes” that educators might tap in a future world. Horney seems to catch Richter’s bubbles and give them a practical spin. Both men are visionaries, and both see promise for education in this new technology. Their styles are completely at odds, yet support each other.

Richter continues to see unlimited potential in the technology. “Wainbrave Bernal is a character who, thus, represents my future,” Richter writes in an email. “I want my avatar to be who I will become. I want to use Second Life as a platform for exploring my possible, preferable, and probable futures.”

## Those Who Demur

Of course, not everyone agrees with Richter.

In the basement level of the UO’s Prince Lucien Campbell Hall, a cheery blue flyer is thumbtacked outside a staff office of the teaching effectiveness program. “Pop culture – Your students love it,” the flyer states. “Wouldn’t it be great to tap into this energy and make your examples, activities and illustrations compellingly connected to their values and interests?” The flyer is advertising a seminar for faculty to learn the ins and outs of MySpace, YouTube, graphic novels and other pop cultural media. Second Life is a major component of the seminar curriculum.

Across the face of the flyer, large, scrawled red letters read: “No please! Pop culture is the downfall of society! Do not



Virtual reality room inside of Second Life