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# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Second Chances With Second Life

**07.03.2007 | Students, Law** University of Dayton law professor Andrea Seielstad's students have worn Daisy Duke shorts, clown feet, a mullet and a fox costume to some classes. Surprisingly, the garb has not been a distraction and has fostered better discussions and legal skills.

These students are practicing appropriate dispute resolution skills — mediation, arbitration and negotiation — in Second Life, the 3-D virtual world where "residents" create characters who can take on any appearance, start businesses, and trade goods and services. In this case, the students create clients and fictitious disputes.

Seielstad utilizes Second Life to break down classroom communication barriers and provoke her students into a new way of thinking about the way nearly 95 percent of cases are settled today.

Seielstad said this method relates to the way "today's students are so used to networking online. The best discussions (back in the classroom) I've had have been after working (with the students) in Second Life."

Second-year UD law student Ryan Beck said he likes how Second Life offers a way to practice using fictitious disputes in a virtually real setting of conference rooms and offices. Plus, he can be in class while at his Dayton home.

"You get the feeling you are actually (at the negotiation table)," Beck said. "Second Life allows you to integrate more of your senses than instant messaging or e-mail. The (characters) can show emotion to support (Second Life's) text-based messaging."

Seielstad and Beck acknowledged that dispute resolution in Second Life currently is just a practice tool and doesn't take the place of face-to-face meetings for real-world disputes. Some lawyers and mediators, including Seielstad, however, are offering private assistance to people and groups in solving disputes involving Second Life business ventures, virtual land use issues and other problems.

They added that Second Life someday could be a more viable forum for real-life negotiation and mediation. Some benefits include allowing participants to better control their emotions in violent or contentious domestic disputes and saving money on travel and video conferencing for disputes involving global transactions.

"Technology-mediated dispute resolution is a growing field and many private products are available to assist parties from around the world in resolving real disputes online," Seielstad said. "Our work in Second Life with mediation has allowed for much reflection on the role of online mediation in the rapidly growing field of alternative dispute resolution."

Besides working in her Second Life classroom, Seielstad said she is able to visit the virtual classrooms of other professors nationwide to network and share the latest teaching tips in real time without leaving campus. Plus, she can capture transcripts of her students' simulations for critique and analysis, and post class materials and presentations in-world, as well.

"As a teaching method, it's fabulous," said Seielstad, who had never used any type of instant-message or chat-room communication before this. "The quality of mediation was better online than in the classroom."

Second Life is growing as a teaching tool around the nation.

Harvard Law School conducts some classes in Second Life and even has created a Second Life courtroom where students can practice their litigation skills.

University of Central Missouri associate English professor Bryan Carter has been taking his writing composition students to Second Life places for almost three years. He asks his students to write about Second Life's subcultures and sites such as their own historical re-creation of Harlem in the 1920s.

"Their writing is much more interesting," said Carter, who said his students will dress their online characters like pixies, Transformers, angels or something related to a writing assignment. "There is an amazing change in maturity and growth from the first days of class."

For more information, contact Andrea Seielstad at 937-229-3801. For interviews, contact Shawn Robinson at 937-229-3391.