Ready to innovate? Try VR in your classroom!

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in collaboration with WSU Online & IT Department

Through an Innovative Tech Grant with WSU Online and the Provost's Office, Dr. Leah Murray was able to incorporate VR into her upper-division Political Science course with the goal of practicing civil discourse.

How did we use VR?

Students were assigned political positions based on advocating for initiatives or issues within the context of a post-campaign speech press conference. Students were prepped by being given a specific role (campaign manager, NYTimes reporter, WSJ reporter, and Slate blog reporter), watching the campaign speech, and taking notes.

They were then physically put in separate rooms to join a meeting room through the virtual reality headsets. Through this anonymity of taking on a role through VR, students discussed the topic more freely and were thoughtful about what they said in a media environment.

We rotated students through the simulation, and students who weren't in the VR headsets watched in the main classroom and took notes on civil discourse. For future sessions, we'd like to include students from other classes, campuses, or universities.

What did students say?

Students enjoyed using the headsets and noted the following benefits:
- Felt like they could speak without fear of reprisal - felt safer opening up - the avatar gave cover.
- On controversial topics, useful to disassociate the actual person from the simulated person.
- Opportunities for collaboration and large-scale simulations with students from universities in other states or countries.
- Beneficial to understand people's belief systems.
- Adds a new way of learning.
- Anecdotally, my students of color liked it more, meaning they needed the "shield" of the avatar maybe more for the harder conversations

What does research say?

Using VR in the classroom can
- Provide a low-anxiety environment where learners may feel "shielded" by their avatars (Melchor-Couto, 2018).
- Provide a distraction-free environment to immerse students in the subject matter, which can help them focus attention on difficult topics (McGovern, et al., 2020; Sharman, 2021).
- Build culturally responsive environments helping students respect cultures different from their own (School of Education, 2019; Shadiev et al., 2021).

How can YOU use VR?

Look at the learning objectives for your course to see if VR could add value through
- Exploring specific environments, scenarios, and history (virtual tours).
- Having students take on a persona and practice it.
- Providing a hands-on experience that students would not normally have otherwise (healthcare, science, etc.).

Meet with an Instructional Designer in WSU Online to discuss the possibilities AND join our Community of Practice in May.