

# *Fiction Writing in Second Life*



*Evaluation Report*

*May, 2011*

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### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge Kevin Chong for inviting me to do this very interesting (and fun!) evaluation and for initiating me into the intricacies of Second Life online learning. I would also like to acknowledge Christine Leclerc, TA in Year 1 of the program, for her support and assistance with technical issues.

I also wish to acknowledge the Fiction Writing in Second Life students, who took the time to complete a fairly lengthy evaluation questionnaire, providing a great deal of valuable and thoughtful feedback.

Carol Munro

Evaluation Consultant.

**Note:** The cover page of this report features a “photo” taken by the evaluator (in foreground) during one of the final Second Life sessions. It shows the instructor’s Avatar seated at the head of the table and course participant’s Avatars seated around the table in the virtual space designed for the course in a regular Friday afternoon session.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

This report constitutes an evaluation of two sessions of creative writing workshops offered through UBC from September to December 2010 and from January to April 2011 (CrWr 439M-001/539D-001, CrWr 439M-001/539D-002), taught by Kevin Chong. These sessions will be referred to as Year 2 sessions in the report.

It also makes comparisons to two earlier sessions, offered Sept. to December, 2009 and January to April, 2010. ( CRWR 439D – 001 – Special Projects in Creative Writing – 2009W; and CRWR 439D – 004 and 539M – 002 – Special Projects in Creative Writing – 2009W), with information drawn from an evaluation report created in May, 2010. These sessions will be referred to as Year 1 sessions.

These workshops were unusual in that they were delivered in the online environment of Second Life. Workshop participants created alter egos, known as Avatars then met weekly in a virtual classroom created for the purposes of the workshop.

Key findings from this evaluation more or less fall into four categories: 1) Marketability – how well the course attracts participants. 2) Technology – how easy or difficult is it for participants to access and use the Second Life system. 3) Interaction – how well does the course allow students to discuss their work in a convivial environment. 4) Learning – did the course provide adequate opportunities for learning from peers and the instructor.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### MARKETABILITY

➔ There is an interest in learning in virtual worlds and it may be that provision of similar creative writing opportunities to learn could increase the number of distance learning students.

➔ The course format appeals to both experienced and relatively inexperienced learners.

- The “fun” aspects of participating through an Avatar appeals to participants. The proliferation of text-messaging may make the text-chat format of this program even more appealing.
- Participants are attracted by anonymity afforded by the format, both from the perspective of giving and receiving feedback. Although the Avatars provide a “physical” presence in the virtual classroom, barriers related to gender, physical appearance and a lack of confidence are largely removed, leaving participants free to focus on the creative writing of their peers.
- The majority of participants were satisfied enough with the learning experience to say that they would consider taking another creative writing course in Second Life. As well, the majority of participants would recommend the Second Life format to others. The level of satisfaction increased in the second year of the course.
- The majority of participants believed that interaction in second life
- Participants who enjoy and benefit from the course are likely to return to another course in this format. Participants who do return are strong advocates for the format
- Participants compared the format favourably with both other online formats and real life classroom experiences.
- Although the novelty of the format is likely to attract students, it is critical to have a skilled instructor/facilitator.

## TECHNOLOGY

- Learning in Second Life requires computers with capability to manage the system as well as high speed internet connections. In addition, the text chat format requires reasonably fast keyboarding skills.
- The majority of participants were comfortable with the text chat format; however an inability to type quickly was a barrier to full participation.
- The use of text chat was more successful than that of voice chat.

## INTERACTION

→ The format does not allow for the level of personal engagement that can happen in a real life situation, but the benefits of anonymity may balance this out. Many participants felt more able to give and receive frank feedback than in a real life environment and the level of satisfaction increased in Year 2 as the adjustments were made to the format.

→ The majority of participants indicated that

- The discussions were lively and interesting and they felt as if they had created community to a certain extent in Second Life.
- They received the type of feedback they were looking for
- The interaction was intimate enough for them to feel comfortable expressing their views
- The interaction helped them to accept the views of others.

Again, the level of satisfaction increased in the Year 2 of the program.

→ Most participants did not believe that the identities they assumed impacted their interaction with others in the virtual classroom.

## LEARNING

→ With respect to giving and receiving feedback and utilizing the feedback to improve their writing, the majority of participants felt that the Second Life environment was almost as good, just as good, as or better than in a real life classroom and once again the level of satisfaction increased considerably between Year 1 and Year 2.

→ While most participants did not feel that they had learned much about themselves in the process of creating an alter ego (Avatar), a few did indicate an increase in self-awareness

→ A few participants indicated that the Second Life experience had impacted what they chose to write about but for the most part, this was not a factor.

→ Participants who had studied with Kevin Chong, the instructor in real life, were as impressed with his teaching skills just as much as in the virtual learning environment as in a real life classroom setting.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are respectfully offered, based on the findings:

- ➔ Ensure that prospective participants have access to adequate technology and reasonably good keyboarding skills
- ➔ Consider recommendations offered by course participants through the evaluation questionnaire
- ➔ Collect some demographic data from participants that will assist in clarifying the target market for Second Life learning
- ➔ It is also recommended that the instructor documents the changes made to the course format between Years 1 and 2 as well as any other changes recommended as a result of his experience in Year 2.

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this course appears to provide a format that is safe, fun and appealing to creative writing students with varying levels of ability. Improvements made to the course following Year 1 have had a marked impact on the level of student satisfaction and learning in Year 2.

This 2-year evaluation of the first creative writing workshop to be offered by UBC using the virtual classroom shows that there is good potential for this format to become an integral part of the distance learning program. The enthusiasm of many participants and the instructors and the level of satisfaction with the level of learning in the workshops is a good indication of the future possibilities.

As with any form of learning, it is “not for everyone”, but for those with reasonably good computer skills and an interest in learning via the World Wide Web, learning in Second Life appears to be an exciting new alternative.

## BACKGROUND

This report constitutes an evaluation of two sessions of distance creative writing workshops (Year 2) which were delivered in the online environment of Second Life and makes comparisons to the findings of an evaluation of two sessions held previously (Year 1). The Year 1 workshop sessions took place from September to December, 2009; and from January to April, 2010, following which an evaluation report was written (May 2010). The Year 2 sessions took place from September to December, 2010 and from January to April, 2011.

Participants met weekly in the UBC virtual classroom in Second Life on Fridays from 3:00 – 5:00 pm. Participants regularly submitted their creative writing and learning occurred through a collaborative peer review process as well as guidance and feedback from the instructor.

The workshops were designed to not only allow students who live to far away from UBC to attend a creative writing workshop, but also to explore the role-playing nature of virtual worlds with the idea that this exploration could then be applied to the creation of literary genres including fiction, playwriting, screenplay and writing for New Media.

In the Second Life virtual world, users create alter egos known as Avatars that they use to explore virtual environments, interact with each other, attend concerts, go dancing, meet for coffee and visit attractions.

Businesses and academic institutions in the “first world” have already taken advantage of Second Life as a setting for virtual gatherings and classes. IBM has used the world for meetings and collaborations. Educational institutions, including New York University and Harvard Law School, have offered courses dealing with new media in Second Life. Writing classes are already being offered on a Second Life region known as “Book Island.” Accredited colleges and universities are joining Second Life at a rate that makes it difficult to keep track of the exact number of them, but a recent count has the figure at over 120.

## METHODOLOGY

This qualitative and participatory evaluation was designed to assess the impact of the Second Life virtual classroom on student learning.

An online questionnaire was developed in consultation with the course instructor, Kevin Chong and the then TA, Christine Leclerc. The evaluator contacted participants prior to the end of each of the workshop sessions, letting them know that they would receive a link to the online questionnaire and inviting them to participate. Links to the questionnaire were sent out

following the last class of each of the two sessions. The evaluator and course instructor followed up with encouragement to those who were slow to participate.

Following the last session of the course (January to April, 2011), 4 participants who had previously engaged in a session were invited to provide written comments, rather than complete the online questionnaire for a second time.

Data collected from course participants was collated and analyzed by the evaluator for the purpose of this report. Where it made sense to do so, data for Year 1 and Year 2 were compared.

In addition to administering the online survey, the evaluator created her own Avatar and attended some of the Second Life classes to observe.

## LIMITATIONS

This qualitative evaluation relies on the feedback from the participants and course instructor. No attempts were made to evaluate the level of improvement in participant's writing capability.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

16 participants in Year 2, completed the online evaluation questionnaire. In addition, 4 participants in the last session, who had previously taken one of the Second Life sessions and had completed questionnaires previously, were invited to provide written feedback relative to why they returned to this learning format one or more times. What follows summarizes the responses from returning students as well as respondents to the online questionnaire from Year 2 course participants (Appendix A) It also draws comparisons to the Year 1 evaluation where appropriate. All comments received in the Year 2 evaluation questionnaires are appended to this report (Appendix B).

## FEEDBACK FROM RETURNING STUDENTS

4 participants in the last class responded to a request for feedback via email. For all, the opportunity to workshop with course instructor Kevin Chong was an important factor in their decision to engage in more than one session. They commented on his facilitation, critiquing and editing skills and his willingness to deal with more than two submissions per student each semester. Other comments related to the fun of working through Avatars; the quality of the feedback from other students, the “turn taking” that the format encourages and the benefits anonymity afforded them. Overall, it appeared that returning students, who were already familiar with the format and how to deal with any presenting technical challenges were well positioned to take good advantage of the learning opportunity.

“It's fun to have an avatar and dress as you might idealize yourself. I especially like having another name and keeping myself unknown.”

“My critiquing has much improved. I like using the "comments on Word" option. I think the students' comments in class have been excellent when, in person, some of them might be more reticent to speak or perhaps may not get a word in edgewise.”

“..... Professor Chong is one of the best workshop-leaders and professors I've had the pleasure to take a class with. The format is great because everyone is encouraged to say their piece; it's paperless, and also the fact that people have to take the time to write down their thoughts means that it's a lot more pre-deliberated and pre-determined than people blurting out their thoughts”

“Speaking as someone who took several writing workshops at Columbia University, I can say that Kevin Chong's Fiction Writing in Second Life class is quite special, and an invaluable experience for a writer, at any level. After two terms in the course, I've seen dramatic improvement, not only in my own writing, but in that of others, particularly among those who took both terms”

“The format of meeting in Second Life fosters a kind of intense 'group-think' I have not encountered elsewhere. This means each story gets attention at many levels: language, plot, character, conflict, voice, point of view. That being said, it all happens rather organically or holistically.”

## WHY PARTICIPANTS CHOSE TO TAKE THE FICTION IN SECOND LIFE RATHER THAN AN ONSITE COURSE

16 participants in the Year 2 classes responded to this question and the findings are similar to those of the Year 1 evaluation.

The most frequently reported reason for taking the course was an interest in the unique online format (50% of respondents). 31% of respondents were attracted to the anonymity of the format. Two individuals chose to take the course because they had worked with the professor previously and wanted to do so again. Other respondents took the course for a variety of reasons; it fit with a schedule or they were unable to take an onsite course, etc.

75% of respondents had taken traditional distance learning courses in the past and three respondents had participated in a previous offering of Fiction in Second Life.

When asked what attracted them to the Second Life format, 4 respondents indicated that the course format was not a factor that particularly attracted them. The remaining respondents were attracted by the novelty of the format, the idea of participating through an Avatar and/or the anonymity that the format afforded them.

“I liked the idea of creating an anonymous identity and pushing the boundaries of traditional communication methods”

“Simply that it generates a sense of being present through an Avatar, rather than a name on a drop-down list.”

With the exception of the students who had previously taken this course, only one respondent had previously visited Second Life. One respondent who had taken the course previously commented that his second experience was better than the first: “The students writing was better for one thing and I felt more in process than in the last session”.

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS LIKED BEST ABOUT THE SECOND LIFE FORMAT

Again, responses to this line of inquiry were similar to those in the Year 1 evaluation.

- 6 respondents most enjoyed creating and/or interacting as Avatars. 3 respondents most liked the anonymity afforded by the format; one was happy to be able to express his/her true gender identity without having this become a focus of attention, the second felt more able to be open and daring with the scope of his/her writing and opinions and the third liked that he/she felt safe in providing feedback.
- 3 respondents articulated that what they liked most was the chat-board format of communicating – including the use of point form comments, the absence of interruption and having the ability to take time to think before responding.
- 5 respondents most liked the quality of feedback they received either because of the respectful nature of delivery or the depth of comment.
- 2 respondents in the January class most liked the scavenger hunt assigned at the first class

“Being able to attend class as a woman and be treated unambiguously as a woman was an amazing and transcendent experience for me.”

“The format acted as an equalizer - No interrupting or overbearing entities.”

“There are deep comments being made online and very polite respectful classmates and instructor.”

“I also enjoyed the fact that I had ample time to flesh out what I was thinking, which is much more difficult to do in person when you cannot see the words you are about to deliver as a whole.”

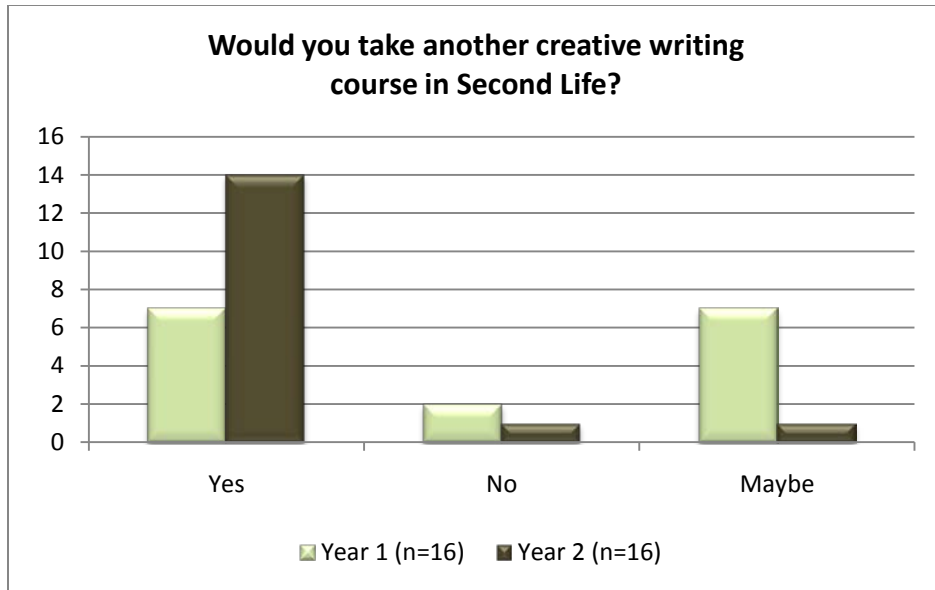
## WHAT PARTICIPANTS LIKED LEAST ABOUT THE SECOND LIFE FORMAT

Participants in the Year 2 evaluation experienced similar technical challenges to those in the Year 1 evaluation. What was different in this evaluation was that there were no comments related to “jumbled” turn-taking, as was articulated by 5 participants in the first evaluation. Also, only one respondent in this evaluation articulated that he/she missed the personal interaction that takes place in a real life classroom, compared to 5 respondents in the first evaluation.

- 11 respondents experienced technical difficulties of some kind including computer crashes, computers that were not powerful enough and an inability to type fast enough. One respondent dealt with the issue of not being able to type fast enough by preparing comments in advance and copying and pasting them into the chat board during the session, however another respondent felt that this method was counter-productive to real discussion. In addition, one respondent found that his/her prepared comments were too long to fit in the text boxes.
- One respondent from the January class was somewhat frustrating that he/she could not hand in hardcopy comments – “Sometimes it is easier to make the changes directly to the document, but I found having to submit comments outside of class a little trying and intimidating.”
- One respondent felt that the dialogue was somewhat stunted and another that thoughts and ideas could become lost within the large amount of text within the chat forums.
- One respondent felt that the online criticism was less gentle than it might have been in a real life setting.

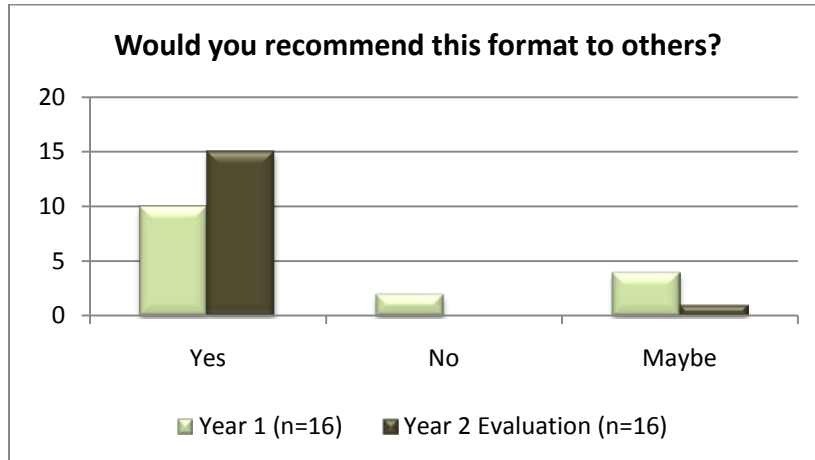
## WOULD PARTICIPANTS TAKE ANOTHER CREATIVE WRITING COURSE IN SECOND LIFE?

Overall a significant number of participants in both Year 1 and Year 2 courses indicated that they would take another creative writing course in Second Life and in fact, four students from Year 1 participated again in Year 2. The level of interest in taking another creative writing course rose considerably in Year 2:



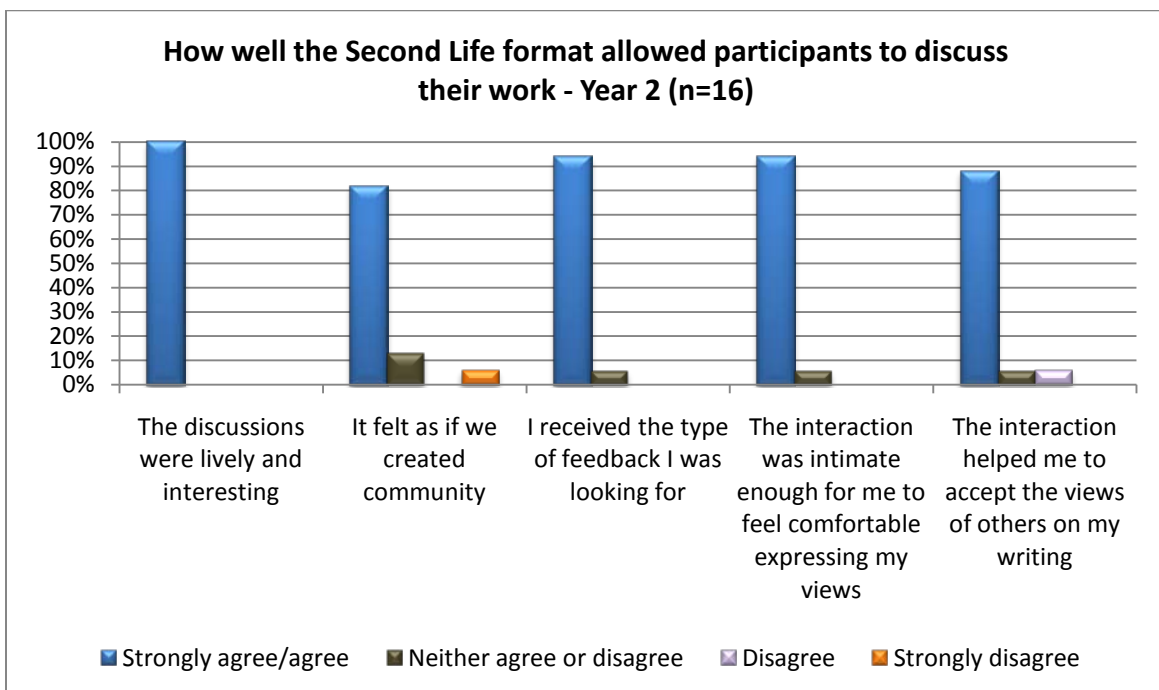
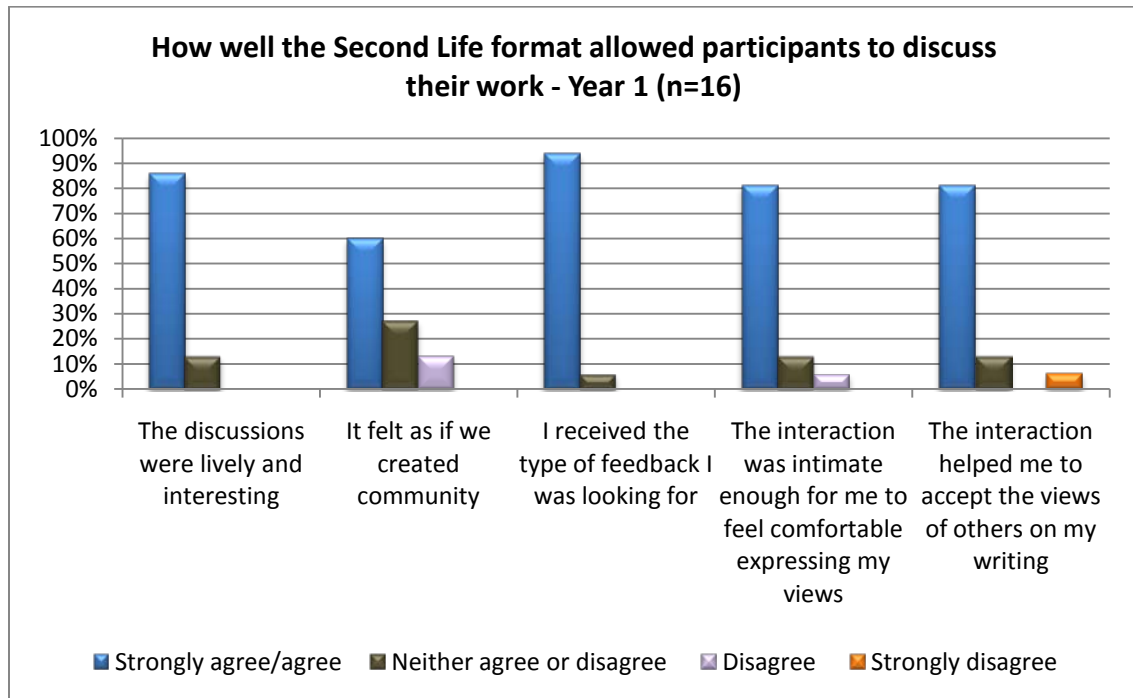
## WOULD PARTICIPANTS RECOMMEND THIS COURSE FORMAT TO OTHERS?

The majority of participants indicated that they would recommend the Second Life format to others and again there was an increase in positive responses to this question in Year 2:



## HOW WELL THE SECOND LIFE FORMAT ALLOWED PARTICIPANTS TO DISCUSS THEIR WORK

The following charts show that in both years, the majority of participants were satisfied with how well the format allowed them to discuss their work. Lowest scores were in the area of “creating community” and once again, Year 2 scores were higher than those in Year 1.



Eight participants comments in this area were varied.

- One participant had difficulty with how deadlines for submissions were handled and felt that because submissions were often late that there was not enough time allowed to critique.
- Three participants commented on the advantages of anonymity and two participants commented on disadvantages of not being face-to-face with classmates.

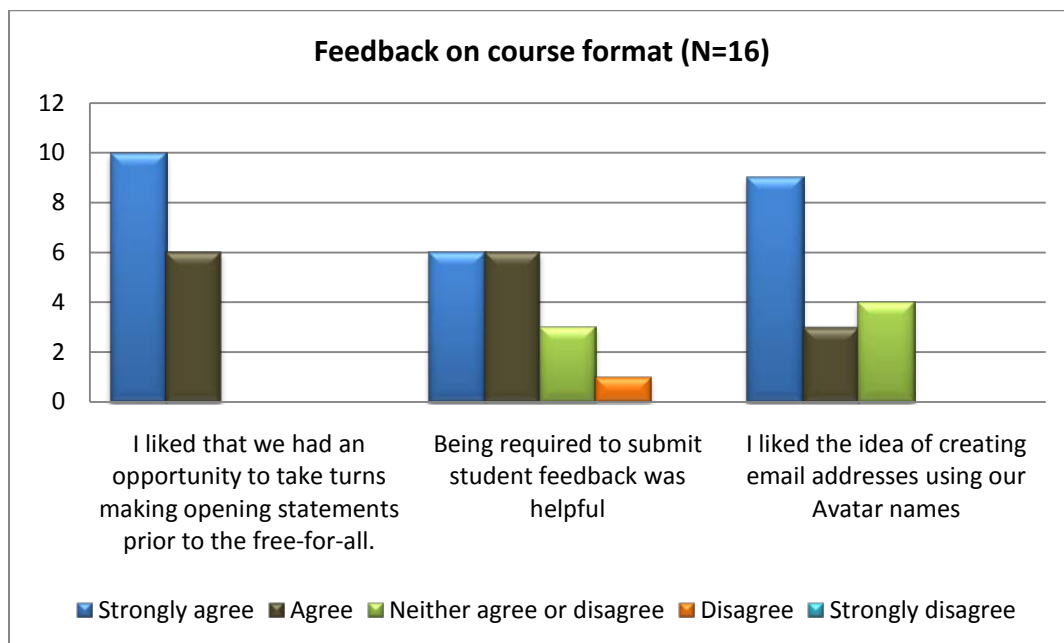
“I found myself much more willing to express my thoughts and personality - in class”

“Tone of voice, sarcasm, seriousness of voice can be lost over chat”

“The strength of this format is not intimacy. It is anonymity”

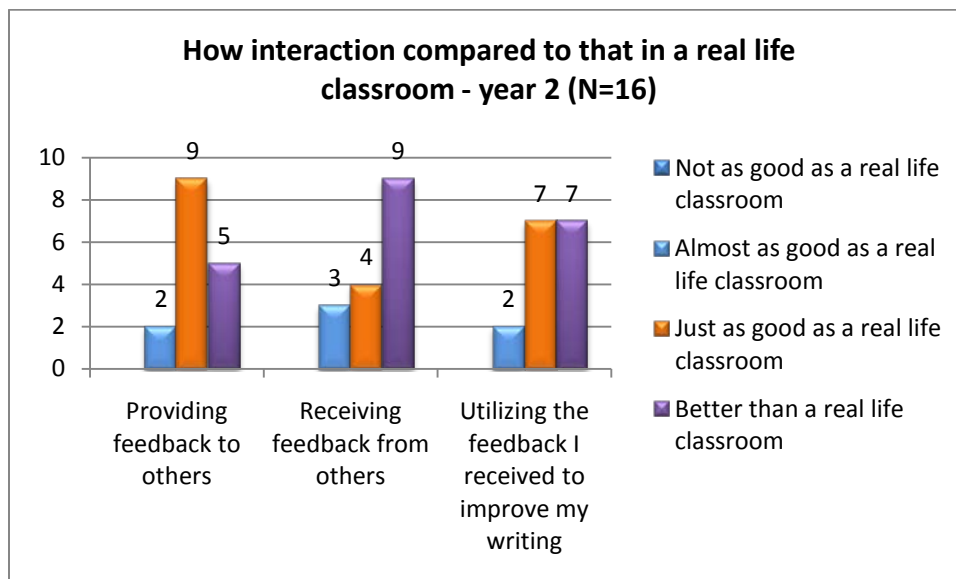
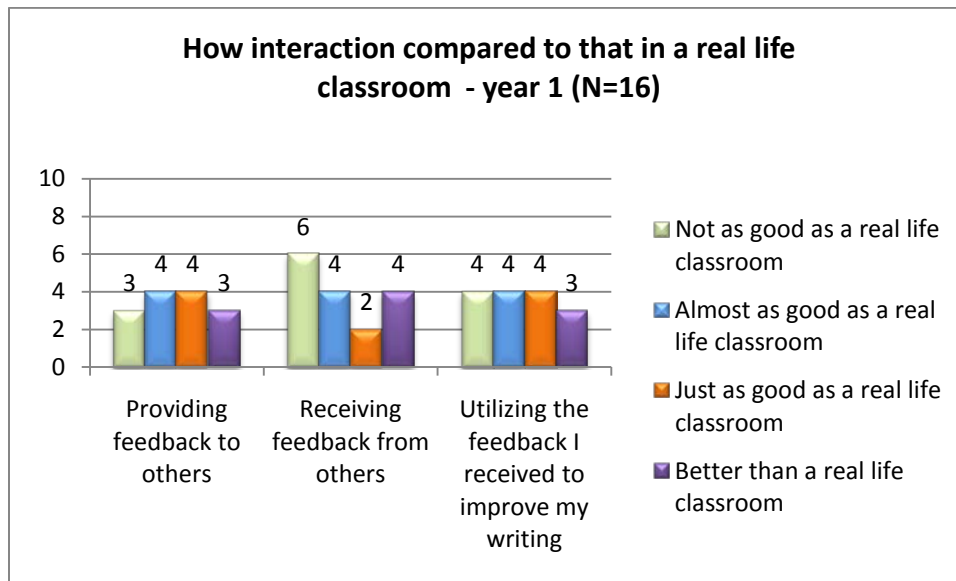
“My critiquing, done after class and sent to each individual, has really improved. My writing has improved as well and I appreciate the feedback and respect I got from the other students and the instructor”

Participants in Year 2 classes were asked to comment on some changes made to the course structure after Year 1. For the most part, these changes appear to be positive, particularly in the area of being able to make opening statements at class meetings in Second Life.



## HOW INTERACTION IN THE SECOND LIFE ENVIRONMENT COMPARED TO A REAL LIFE CLASS

Overall, it appears that the course interaction has improved in the second year with the majority of participants articulating that interaction in the Second Live classroom was as good - or better than in real life.



- Two respondents indicated that they prefer receiving written comments to in classroom feedback.

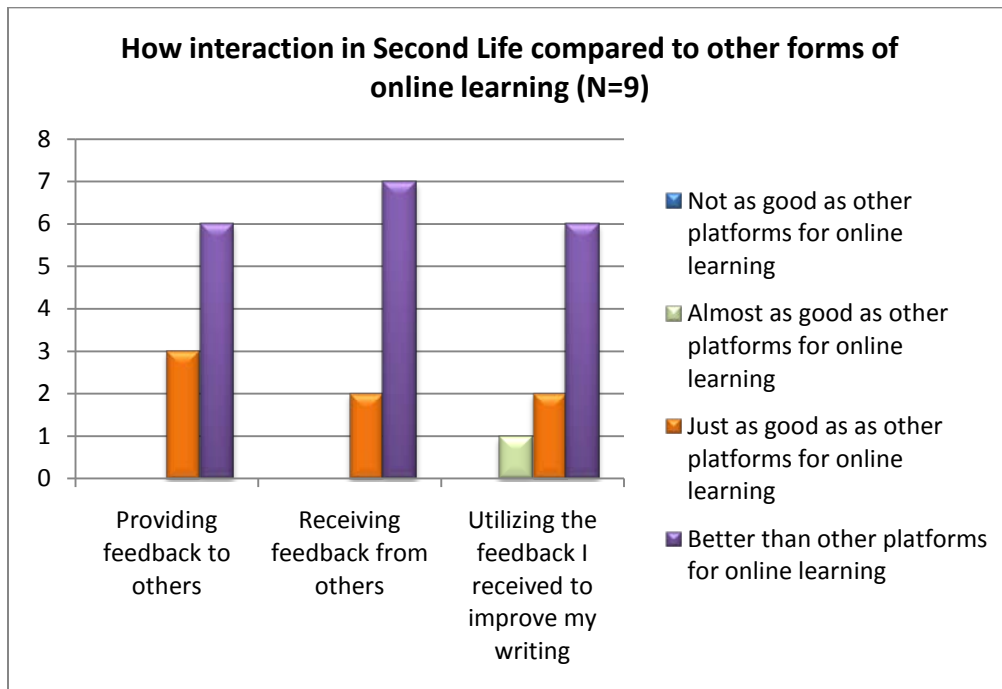
- One respondent said that although it was sometimes frustrating to have to think more about pieces that had already been discussed in detail in class, he/she appreciated receiving the “enriched” written feedback and that this was extremely beneficial.

“I really like getting all my feedback in print. In a classroom setting, I can only take in so much feedback before I start to lose some of the details. Getting feedback in Second Life meant that I automatically got a transcript of every session and could refer back to it later when I was revising”

“In some ways, for me it was better, but I hesitated to ever call the virtual better than the real thing”.

## HOW INTERACTION IN SECOND LIFE COMPARED TO OTHER FORMS OF ONLINE LEARNING

Participants in both Year 1 and Year 2 were asked how interaction in Second Life compared to other forms of on line learning. There were no responses in Year 1, however Year 2 students had more experience with distance learning and for the most part they indicated that the Second Life format was as good, or better than other platforms:



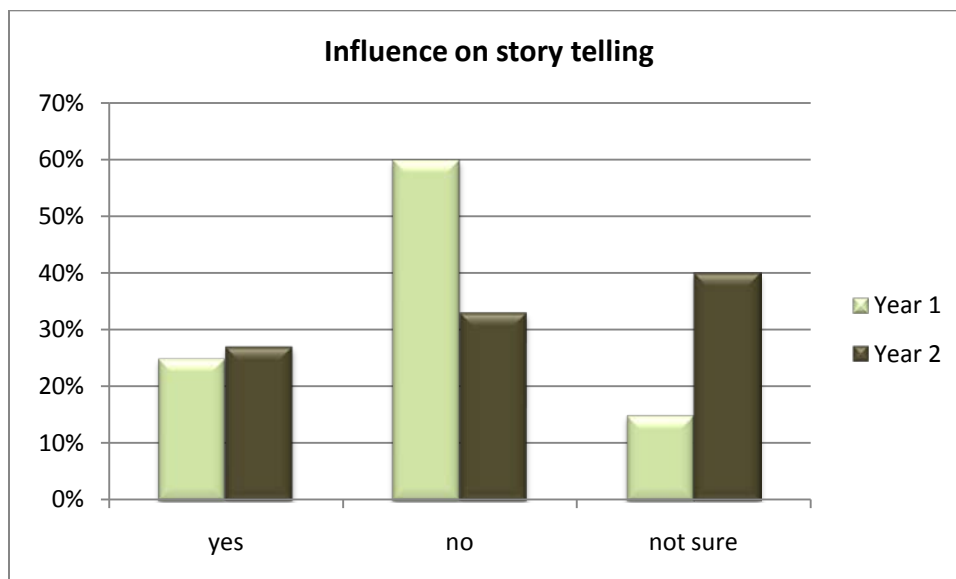
“It felt more like a real classroom than any sort of Vista platform I have used before. I never got to chat in real time with any classmates before this when taking distance courses”

“All I have to compare it to is Web CIT/Vista (which is terrible) and Moodle (which is not quite ready for prime time)”

### WHAT, IF ANYTHING PARTICIPANTS LEARNED ABOUT THEMSELVES THROUGH THE PROCESS OF CREATING THEIR AVATARS

14 participants responded to this question and for the most part, the responses were about the process of creating their Avatars rather than anything they had learned about themselves. One respondent noted that he/she became aware that even as an Avatar, he/she prefers certain physical characteristics over others and a second noted that he/she was vain, and a third noted that he/she was “more normal than I thought”. Overall, it appears that the process was simply fun for most and the results of the Year 1 evaluation are similar.

### IF PARTICIPANTS LEARNED SOMETHING ABOUT THEMSELVES THROUGH CREATING AVATARS, DID THIS LEAD TO ANY REFLECTION THAT MIGHT HAVE INFLUENCED THEIR STORY TELLING/ CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT SKILLS?



For the most part, comments showed that the Avatar persona did not have much influence in this area. Three respondents in Year 2 commented that it had some influence:

- “It lent itself to some interesting story concepts and ideas on other worlds/alternative universes”
- “It did inspire me to write a story. Yes, it stimulated a fresh perspective!”

## HOW THE ASSUMED IDENTITIES IMPACTED ON HOW STUDENTS INTERACTED WITH OTHERS IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

30% of 16 respondents in the Year 2 group did not feel that the identity they had assumed had any impact on how they interacted with others. The remainder commented on how they were more uninhibited as their Avatars. (These responses were similar to the 3 respondents in year one who felt that their assumed identities had some impact).

- “I felt like I had no real life "limits" to my identity. I was the "ghost" of the classroom (literally) and it allowed me to be mischievous in ways I've never been before”
- “I think there were more interactions than, say, if I had met the same people in real life. Even though I was still relatively shy in Second Life, I still found myself talking more than I would have in First Life.”

## COMMENTS ON HOW THE IDENTITY ASSUMED AND/OR THE SECOND LIFE ENVIRONMENT IMPACTED WHAT PARTICIPANTS CHOSE TO WRITE ABOUT IN THIS COURSE

63% of 16 respondents in Year 2 did not have any impact on what they chose to write about (69% in Year 1). The remainder (6 respondents) indicated that the Second Life environment had a direct impact on stories they had written while in the course. (Only 2 students in the first year were influenced in this way):

- “I wrote one story about a virtual or synthetic entity inhabiting a universe filled with synthetic entities - which is required to descend into a material body on Earth”
- “The Second Life environment was very inspiring for writing virtual reality, science fiction, and fantasy based pieces. The second life chat format played a particularly large role in influencing one of my pieces which focused on the role of internet-based relationships in our society”
- “Thought about and included alternative universe concepts in my writing, which i would not have done previously”

## COMMENTS ON HOW THE APPEARANCE OR THE IDENTITIES ASSUMED BY OTHERS IN THE COURSE IMPACTED PARTICIPANTS VIEW OF THEM AND/OR THEIR WRITING

100% of Year 1 respondents and 31% of Year 2 students articulated that the appearance of others in the course had no impact on how they viewed the writing. While 4 respondents to the Year 1 surveys felt that not knowing anything about their classmates identities allowed them to criticise all work equally, only 1 Year 2 respondent indicated that he/she felt the same way. In addition, 6 Year 2 respondents believed that the appearance of others did have some impact. Interestingly, 4 Year 2 respondents made comments specific to gender bias. Overall it appeared that the students gained a new awareness of their biases; perhaps an unintended but useful aspect of the course format.

- “If they had a female/male avatar, I would usually view the writing as being written by that respective gender, which perhaps gave it a "bias" of sorts”
- “This was ... strange. Hard to tell who was female and who male, and that is actually pretty important to me.”
- “The anonymity took out the factor of judgement based on one’s look or presentation; more focus on their work”
- “It was an interesting way to judge everyone’s comments equally.”

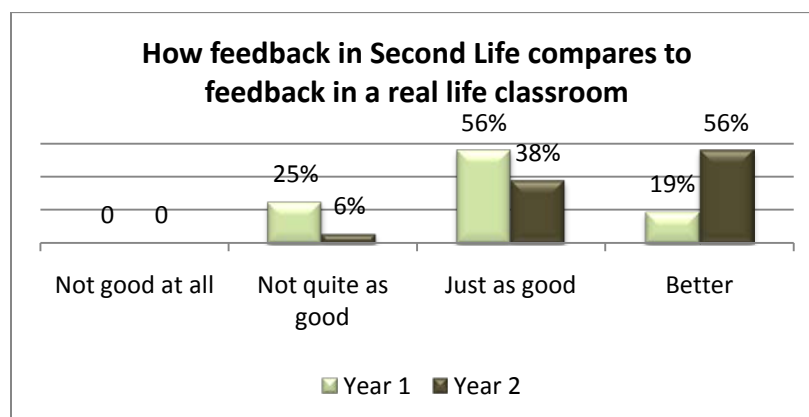
## DID COURSE PARTICIPANTS EXPLORE THE VIRTUAL WORLD OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM WHILE INVOLVED IN THE COURSE?

48% of Year 1 participants and 56% of year Year 2 participants responded that they had explored Second Life outside of the classroom although most appeared to have done so in a very limited way. Those responding in the affirmative were asked to describe any ways in which this might have impacted their writing. Two Year 1 respondents indicated that the exploration of SL had provided them with inspiration or ideas for their writing. One Year 2 respondent said that he/she has an in depth nature motif in his/her story and that there was lots of nature to wander through in Second Life. Another Year 2 respondent said that his/her writing was inspired by a “fairy tale” location in Second Life.

- “I did base my second submission on the SL world”
- “Only for the one assignment where we had to collect snap shots. I spent way too much time looking for the perfect shots. Other than that, I didn't spend any time exploring”
- “I only did so in a very limited manner. I quickly grew bored with the limited graphics and my general incomprehension of the point of the world”.

## COMPARING THE FEEDBACK RECEIVED IN THIS COURSE TO FEEDBACK RECEIVED IN A REAL LIFE CLASSROOM SITUATION.

Participants in both Year 1 and Year 2 classes were very satisfied with how feedback compared to that in a real life classroom:



The majority of participants commented positively on feedback from classmates and/or the instructor. Two Year 2 respondents had not participated in a real life classroom. In Year 1, participants were not required to provide written feedback to each other. Then in Year 2, in response to feedback from Year 1 students they were required to do so. This change was apparently successful, although one participant complained about the quality of the feedback he/she received from classmates.

- “I don’t really have a class to compare this experience to, but I can say that I have never had as much individual attention paid to my work as in this course. I felt like it was thorough and very helpful!”
- “Written feedback was strong in this course, participants had to take time to prepare a written piece, not just a few notes on my drafts”
- “I liked that everyone in class was forced to say something. I dislike RL classes where half the class sits in silence”
- “I had very detailed feedback and strong encouragement in the RL fiction classes I took in CrWr. Kevin's feedback and steering of the course has helped me phenomenally at this point in my process”.

## WORKING WITH KEVIN CHONG IN SECOND LIFE

6 respondents to the Year 1 evaluation surveys and 1 respondent to the Year 2 surveys had studied with Kevin in a real life classroom. All agreed that he was a fine instructor in both settings and one respondent noted that Kevin handled the Second Life workshop in a similar way to a real life setting

## LEVEL OF COMFORT WITH THE TEXT-CHAT FORMAT

Participants were asked to comment on how comfortable they were with the text-chat format. 81% of participants in Year 1 classes and 88% of participants in Year 2 classes were comfortable with the text-chat format. In both years, a few participants had some difficulty participating because of a lack of ability to type quickly enough.

The level of comfort with the text-chat format is likely due in part to the fact that text messaging is emerging as a common way of communicating. As one participant said “I

was very comfortable with the text-chat format, as text based communication is one of the most widely used forms of communication in our daily lives as well,”

## PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE COURSE FORMAT

Year 1 participants made a few suggestions for improving the course format. These were reviewed by the instructor following the first evaluation. While some Year 2 participants indicated that they like the course the way it is, a few suggestions for improvements were made. Three participants felt that limiting the number of submissions or workshopping fewer stories each week would allow for more individual attention. Other comments were varied and are worth consideration. These can be found on Page 38

## COMMENTS ON THE EVALUATION FORMAT

Generally, participants were satisfied with the evaluation format. Two participants commented that it was long and one of these felt that although long, it was an effective way to get feedback on the course.

## APPENDIXES

### Appendix A – Participant Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to gather feedback on your experience with the Fiction Writing on Second Life format - for the main purpose of evaluating the program.

As you will see, the majority of the questions are open-ended. This means that you will need to take time to reflect upon your answers, and that the process of responding may not be as quick as you might have wished! In attempt to mitigate the "burden", I have posted the survey in such a way that you don't have to respond in one "sitting". You can complete part of the survey, then return to it later to add more - provided that you use the same computer you started with.

Although completing the questionnaire in a thoughtful way might take you an hour or so, I am hoping that the process of responding will be beneficial in that it will provide you with opportunities to reflect upon and learn from the experience of participating in the Second Life learning format in ways that will impact positively on your writing in the future.

As a participant in this new form of distance learning, your feedback is important and will be much appreciated.

If you have any questions about the evaluation, you can contact me at [carolonmayne@shaw.ca](mailto:carolonmayne@shaw.ca) .

Please complete your questionnaire by:

Thank you for your participation

Regards

Carol Munro (aka Hattie Ziplon)  
[carolonmayne@shaw.ca](mailto:carolonmayne@shaw.ca)

1. Why did you choose to take this course via distance learning rather than an onsite course?
2. Have you taken other distance learning courses in the past? If you answered "Yes", which other distance learning courses have you taken?
3. Is this your first experience with distance learning using the Second Life format?
4. What attracted you to the Second Life format?
5. Had you visited Second Life prior to taking this course? If you answered "Yes" please tell me about your previous experience with Second Life

6. What did you like most about using the Second Life format for this course?
7. What did you like least about using the Second Life format for this course?
8. Would you take another creative writing course using the Second Life format? Please comment.
9. Would you recommend this format to others?
10. How well did the Second Life sessions allow you to discuss your work?
11. How did the interaction compare to other course formats?
12. What, if anything did you learn about yourself through the process of creating your Avatar?
13. If you learned something about yourself through creating your Avatar, did this lead to any reflection that might have influenced your story telling or character development skills?
14. Please comment on how the identity you assumed impacted on how you interacted with others in the virtual classroom
15. Please comment on how the identity you assumed and/or the Second Life environment impacted what you chose to write about in this course.
16. Please comment on how the appearance or the identities assumed by others in the course impacted your view of them and/or their writing.
17. During the time you were involved in this course did you explore the Second Life world outside of the virtual classroom?
18. How would you compare the feedback you received in this course to feedback you receive in a real life classroom situation?
19. If you have studied with Kevin Chong in real life, how would you compare the experience to that of studying with Keith in Second Life?
20. Please comment on how comfortable you were with the text-chat format?
21. Do you have any recommendations about how to improve the format of this course?
22. Do you have any comments on the evaluation format?

## Appendix B – Comments from Year 2 Course Participants (N=16)

### Why did you choose to take this course via distance learning rather than an onsite course?

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- I have been in several fiction writing workshops, but never one in this format. It helped me! More focused.
- Because I am a graduate of the program and can't get back in - also to work with Kevin Chong who is an excellent reader and mentor, and to get more feedback on my writing without having to deal with in-person issues.
- Because I have never taken a Creative Writing course and wasn't too confident about my writing, I figured that being critiqued online would be much easier for me.
- I don't think I was eligible for an onsite equivalent. (I'm not in the creative writing program.)
- I chose to take this course via distance learning simply out of curiosity as to what a class set in a virtual world would be like.
- Because doing a writing class via distance learning provides a forum for work shopping that is much more comfortable and honest than an onsite course. Having the opportunity to express concerns and observations about someone else's work from behind a computer screen means that even if I have criticism, I can express myself openly.
- It worked well with my schedule and it sounded like an exciting new platform to try a class in.
- I really liked the idea of role-playing. It also keeps my identity anonymous, so I find it much easier (and more comfortable) talking in class.
- I was interested in the possibility of playing with representation online. I also liked that it seemed more interactive than some other correspondence courses.
- The prof.

Jan – April Group Comments:

- It was more based on the fact that I liked the theme of this class more than whether it was online or not. But I did think that it being online was unique and intriguing.
- Convenience.
- The online classroom provides an alternative learning environment that promotes creativity with a sense of anonymity. Essentially, the online forum provides a medium for pushing limits and expanding the creative voice beyond the traditional parameters of an onsite course.
- I chose to take this course via distance learning because it fit well into my work and travel schedule ( I live 2 hrs away).
- interested in the format, different
- For the opportunity to write and workshop some things anonymously. I'll not have the chance to take a university course in this format again.

**If you answered Yes (have taken distance learning courses in the past) which other distance learning courses have you taken?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- SL last term
- ENG 303, PSYC 304
- I've taken many, at SFU (Communications, Religious Studies, Mythology, Canadian Studies, etc.) and a couple at UBC (ENGL 321, ENGL 322).
- I have taken distance learning courses in high school, some of which comprised of paper modules and others that involved online participation during classes.
- I have taken this course before.
- EOSC 114, WMST 300, PSYCH 314, ENG 468, FIST 332
- second life: the original

Jan – April Group Comments:

- ENGL 321 - Traditional English Grammar
- Film Studies, English Lit, Earth Science
- Cultural Psychology and Romantic Literature
- other creative writing courses, psych courses

**What attracted you to the Second Life format?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Fun. The format stimulates the imagination. Also, anonymity is ideal in a fiction workshop - and avatars provide great anonymity - gets rid of limits of gender, age, race.
- As I mentioned above, I could get in. I did not know what the course was about in January when I signed up.
- The fact that we can "hide" behind our avatars - for me, it's a lot easier to openly discuss things in that format rather than face-to-face in a normal classroom setting.
- It was the opportunity to take the course that attracted me; the fact that it was in Second Life was not a factor in me taking it, Initially.
- Simply that it generates a sense of being present through an avatar rather than a name on a drop down list.
- I like the creative edge that Second Life provides. There is so much room for creative exploration in Second Life.
- I liked the freedom of it, and the fact that I could remain anonymous. In a creative writing class you are always nervous about what other people will think of your work, so doing it this way helps to minimize the fear and apprehension about sharing your work.
- The idea of role-playing and interacting with a virtual reality world
- Because I tend to be more reserved in a classroom and was curious about how taking a distance learning course may affect that.
- Different point of view. The prof

Jan – April Group Comments:

- It was different! We were sent an email alerting us to the existence of this course, and I thought the concept was pretty neat. But like I said, I didn't take this class because of the Second Life format. It was more like, I would have taken this class anyway and the Second Life format was just a bonus.
- Interesting idea, something new to try.
- I had not heard of Second Life before this course. I was a bit apprehensive about the Second Life format in that it was a space open to the public. I liked the idea of creating an anonymous identity and pushing the boundaries of traditional communication methods.
- Avatars! I liked the idea that we were meeting online because I had never taken a creative writing course before and it made me less nervous being able to provide feedback through the use of my avatar!
- its a pretty cool concept, getting to be a different character was appealing
- Mostly because it was a new idea to me. I like to try new things.

**If you answered "Yes" (previously visited Second Life) please tell me about your previous experience with Second Life**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Last term. I had a better time this term. The students' writing was a lot better for one thing. And I felt more in process than I did last session. So let's see how next session deepens my work. Kevin is very, very encouraging.
- I've only tried Second Life once prior to the course. I was being introduced to it by a friend and I spent a few hours on it.
- Yes. But not before the first time I took this course.
- **What did you like most about using the Second Life format for this course?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- It's easy to use, once you upload it. What I liked most was interacting as avatars.
- There are deep comments being made online and very polite respectful classmates and instructor. It's fun to see the avatars as well. I am surprised by the depth of comments by students who may not even be majors. I have had very good feedback. Impressive. I'm satisfied.
- Being able to have an avatar and be creative with it.
- I liked that I was able to express my true gender identity without having it become the focus of attention. Being able to attend class as a woman and be treated unambiguously as a woman was an amazing and transcendent experience for me.
- Also, the way things worked out was that we stuck to typing rather than using the microphone, which was interesting but worked. I also liked the degree of anonymity that allowed us to feel free with expressing our ideas, both critiquing and otherwise, while everyone was courteous enough not to haze or otherwise flame each other. I also enjoyed the fact that I had ample time to flesh out what I was thinking, which is much more difficult

- to do in person when you cannot see the words you are about to deliver as a whole. I felt this enriched the feedback I could give to people.
- The freedom to create my avatar and being able to communicate with other students through the chat board.
  - To be honest? I really liked the first assignment where we went on a mission to take pictures of certain things we felt represented the themes KeithMoon set out for us.
  - I liked being able to customize my avatar. I also enjoyed exploring the world during our scavenger hunt exercise.
  - I liked the flexibility it gave me with my schedule and I found it easier to voice my opinion using Second Life than in person.
  - Accessibility

Jan – April Group Comments:

- I liked that it was - distanced. I think for some people it was their first time in a writing workshop setting, and it can be hard. Because our mark partly depends on our ability to find all the flaws in people's work, and sometimes a submission gets torn apart. Some people aren't able to handle that because they're not used to it, and it's also really hard to see something you've worked for hours on ripped to shreds. I feel having this online format helped people handle it, because it wasn't a face-to-face "attack". It was online. You could walk away for a bit and come back. And, in my opinion, it comes across as less harsh and far less intimidating when you don't actually have to face your critics.  
Also, the Second Life format allowed us to speak. I am rather shy about speaking up in class, but with the online format, I didn't feel scared about speaking up. And I knew everyone could and did hear (see) me. Also, it was easier to think and plan what to say. There is no backspace key in real life. So that really helped me.  
Finally, I liked it because it let me ... not hold grudges? When people were just avatars, they kind of blended together. If it were a real classroom, I admit I probably would have found someone to be bitter about, and that possibly could even be just the way they deliver their critique and not even something that serious.
- It was easy to interact with classmates, cool to put a virtual face to their virtual 'voices'
- Again, the sense of anonymity was the highlight of this course for me. I felt able to be more open and daring with the scope of both my writing and my opinions. Using chat to communicate ideas also proved to be an efficient medium.
- I liked the way in which it provided a safe venue to provide feedback on the stories. I think I would have been even more shy then I already was had this course been in person. It helped take away the intimidation factor for me!
- ability to be or go where ever you wanted
- The relaxed setting of my own home, my own music playing. Also because the format acted as an equalizer. No interrupting or overbearing entities. Everyone's comments were point-form in the chat.

**What did you like least about using the Second Life format for this course?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Well, I did crash twice, but no big deal. We didn't actually use SL much, except as a space in which to meet and chat. But it created a realistic feeling - almost like a real place.

- Not sure, This term I am using another computer which is better than my netbook so the whole experience is improved. I am glad we are not using the microphones. I like the anonymity.
- I use a netbook primarily and SL runs a bit slow on it.
- I'm not the fastest typist, but I was able to compensate by typing most of my comments in advance and copying and pasting.
- The limit in the text boxes. Sometimes we prepared comments but the text limit would be far too small to contain them. I understand this may vary from version to version of SL, however, and it is a minor frustration. The one other thing that posed some frustration was the fact we could not hand in hardcopy comments. Sometimes it is easier to make the changes directly to the document, but I found having to submit comments outside of class a little trying and intimidating. On the whole, this SL worked extremely well.
- The Second Life program requires a computer with a lot of power. My computer is weak, so it froze several times during class. I'd suggest in the future for a warning about this issue.
- .... I guess just technology sometimes causing issues and having an inability to get to my class.
- I find it hard to adjust the screen and to move around. I don't really like using the move and view buttons all that much.
- I had a lot of problems with the program at the beginning of the semester.
- Dialogue is stunted. Can't really open an elaborate conversation

#### Jan – April Group Comments:

- Actually, what I like most is also what I dislike most. Being distanced made the course impersonal. The atmosphere ... in my opinion, it was really tense and awkward. It didn't feel like we were a solid group (however, that did not result in me being scared to voice my opinion). There wasn't any bonding that went on, and some people were possibly looking at other things like Facebook (Not me, I swear! I found that if I looked away, I got lost in the conversation. Besides, I don't use Facebook.) instead of paying attention. Though I don't feel that was really an issue, it COULD have been.  
And I actually felt there was a little of a clique that was evident from the beginning, comprised of the people who had taken the course before. That is unavoidable, really, but I think it was more prominent online than it would have been in an actual classroom. In addition, I think people would be a little gentler with their criticism in real life because online, you have a computer screen as a shield, and you feel safer in being hard on people. If it's in an actual classroom, though, you don't want to come off as super mean.
- SL is not an easy program to familiarize yourself with, initially.
- Sometimes thoughts and ideas could become lost within the large amount of text in the chat forums.
- Due to the fact that I was using a ancient computer, I found I was not able to type quick enough for some conversations, the topics wold move to quick for my keyboard to keep up and then my moment for a comment would pass:(
- would have liked to hold class in some different settings, seen a few more things, had a few class field trips
- There wasn't any reason not to just copy+paste comments from our written comments. Kevin kept discussion going, but it felt like people could have just emailed their wall-of-text and not shown up.

## **What, if anything did you learn about yourself through the process of creating your Avatar?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Not that much, actually.
- I wish I could change my avatar's hair. I had to put a hat on because I can't change it. I would like to experiment with a different look for the fun of it. But I like the way she looks. She's like me. So I can investigate myself, I suppose.
- I had already created my avatar before this course but I did want an avatar that wasn't confined to a specific gender or stereotype. I wanted something unusual and fun.
- I gave it a lot of thought and care, but I don't know how to put into words what I learned through the process.
- I did not alter my Avatar from its default state, having attempted an initial customisation and lost several hours to a fruitless effort. In time, I learned to see that avatar as my own rather than a default. I suppose I may also have proven myself slightly vain, having chosen an individual who looked somewhat similar to my Real life appearance whilst tweaking some features of the face and, of course, the height.
- That even just as an avatar I prefer certain physical characteristics over others. It would be interesting if we had to change things about our avatars every week and have the class spend 5 minutes trying to figure out what each avatar changed, This would allow us to be more physically aware of each other's avatar and not just rely on the names floating above their heads.
- That I really like Star Wars apparently.
- Not really sure...my avatar is completely different from my real self (different gender, even).
- I'm vain.

Jan – April Group Comments:

- I didn't learn anything there.
- That I have trouble coming up with fictitious names.
- I didn't find this to be very insightful, it didn't reflect a lot about myself.
- I learned that perhaps I am a lot more normal than I thought! It was great to see what crazy creative avatars everyone else had come up with.
- That I find it amusing for a 8 ft. killer robot to sit in the corner and gush over creative fiction. ie: it is fun to pretend you are something that you are not.

## **If you learned something about yourself through creating your Avatar, did this lead to any reflection that might have influenced your story telling or character development skills?**

Jan – April Group Comments:

- I didn't find creating the avatar to be that reflective of my own creativity. If I had taken more time or had been more familiar with Second Life I might have developed this better.
- I don't know if it was creating my Avatar that necessarily helped my story telling skills. I rather believe it was learning from everyone else in the classroom and listening to the

critiques of their work. I tried to keep it all in my own mind when I tried to write my first story.

- it lent itself to some interesting story concepts and ideas on other worlds/alternative universes
- Writing about role playing or shape shifting came up.

**Please comment on how the identity you assumed impacted on how you interacted with others in the virtual classroom**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Well, it was a very nice screen, being my avatar.
- She's more like me so I'm interacting as I am but she's younger and it took a while for people to realize I was older. It's nice being younger!! I can try to blend in when I don't get half of their literary references.
- I felt like I had no real life "limits" to my identity. I was the "ghost" of the classroom (literally) and it allowed me to be mischievous in ways I've never been before.
- It didn't change the way I acted, but it did change the way my actions were perceived. I felt more congruity between how people saw me and how I see myself.
- It was slightly freeing. Being that it was an online classroom, it may have been easier to slip in humorous remarks and emoticons, etc.
- N/A
- I don't feel like I created much of an identity. I was myself but in an avatar form.
- I think there were more interactions than, say, if I had met the same people in real life. Even though I was still relatively shy in Second Life, I still found myself talking more than I would have in "First Life."
- I meant to change my appearance throughout the semester and initially chose someone who was physically the opposite of me, but I ended up enjoying the identity. I wasn't super-diligent about maintaining the different persona, but it was fun pretending to be someone else.
- it didn't

Jan – April Group Comments:

- I was pretty true to myself, so I don't think it changed anything. However, it did make me rather off-balance with dealing with my classmates.
- I think the identities of all the people in the class varied, which made it an interesting experience.
- I don't think the identity itself played a large role in my interaction with others, it was more of a personal ability to be less inhibited or shy.
- The mere fact that the people within the class did not know me helped me get over being overwhelmed by the new subject material. Since everyone was a whacky and zany character there was no way for people to know who had taken the course before or who was a creative writing major. I felt it gave me more confidence being able to interact through the fictional avatar.

- I picked an identity that was pretty close to me, female, young, red hair. I felt comfortable in being able to express myself
- It did not. It was just a mask. Maybe next time it will be wildly different.

**Please comment on how the identity you assumed and/or the Second Life environment impacted what you chose to write about in this course**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- I wrote one story about a virtual or synthetic entity inhabiting a universe filled with synthetic entities - which is required to descend into a material body on Earth.
- Again, no impact yet. I will try an SL story soon and bring it next term. Then I will have a better answer. I do notice that a lot of people are being more creative in a different way than in RL.
- In my first assignment, I tried to make my main character as genderless as possible, to continue the theme of limitless possibilities.
- Similarly, it didn't change what I wrote about. But it might have changed how my writing was perceived.
- The instructor encouraged us to think about other worlds. I seldom think in the world we come from in any case, so I felt right at home continuing as I have.
- N/A
- It didn't.
- It didn't really affect what I chose to write about. I always wanted to write fantasy stories, and I did.
- I don't think it affected my writing at all.
- definitely more experimental in writing

Jan – April Group Comments:

- It didn't. I chose an avatar based on what I wrote, not the other way around.
- It didn't really affect my writing.
- The Second Life environment was very inspiring for writing virtual reality, science fiction, and fantasy based pieces. The second life chat format played a particularly large role in influencing one of my pieces which focused on the role of internet-based relationships in our society.
- Again, I don't think my character impacted my subject matter (my avatar was a bit boring in retrospect). But hearing other peoples plots and story lines definitely helped me gather new ideas. In fact, it was after reading Sonam's piece that I decided to settle on writing about politics (my own major)!
- thought about and included alternative universe concepts in my writing, which i would not have done previously.
- It gave me the impetus to write/think about topics that I might not have otherwise: such as 'sexy writing'.

**Please comment on how the appearance or the identities assumed by others in the course impacted your view of them and/or their writing**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Sometimes their avatars brought out outrageousness. It sort of heightened the reality of each person.
- Wings and pre modernist clothing reflect the minds and personalities of the identities in this class. We all get to play out who we might like to be. I think one or two are appearing as male when they are not and that is interesting.
- If they had a female/male avatar, I would usually view the writing as being written by that respective gender, which perhaps gave it a "bias" of sorts.
- Some of the identities informed how I read their work. If someone comes to class with wings and a cloud of sparkling faerie dust and proceeds to write fantasy pieces I assume they are serious about the genre and not just dabbling in it. Oddly, it was the people whose avatars were least human who seemed the easiest to get a read on what they might be like in real life--Rubber and Acrid.
- I simply wondered who they were and why they had chosen to portray themselves the way they did. I honestly did not judge them... except for an individual who had customised a Boo costume for his avatar - the act of which I found kinship inducing.
- I made assumptions about people's writings based on their avatars just as I would make assumptions about people's physical appearances if it was a real life class. It is interesting when you see how much the first life person's physical appearance tends to differ from that of their avatar.
- It didn't. I really don't feel like avatars have much of an impact.
- I didn't really think much about their appearance/identities, because I knew that what I saw were just avatars. It helped me focus on what's being written as opposed to who wrote the story (since I don't know who is writing it or what they even look like).
- Most of the time I don't look at who wrote the story before I read it, but I probably looked closer at their comments than in a classroom because I was trying to figure out who they are/what they look like in real life.
- The names created a preconceived idea of other students

Jan – April Group Comments:

- This was ... strange. Hard to tell who was female and who male, and that is actually pretty important to me. Also, there were no visual cues as to how people were delivering their critique. It was only text, making it more difficult to interpret the tone. And yeah, it definitely affected my perceptions of their personalities.
- I think some people in the class were more creative with their identities and others were less into it. It didn't detract from their writing in the cases where they were less into it.
- I did not pay a lot of attention to the appearance assumed by others in the classroom, the most influential part of the avatar identity was probably the name. The avatars themselves did not impact my view of them and their writing.
- I loved the originality of many of the classes avatars. Many of the appearances and identities were ageless and sexless, which really made reading their work interesting.
- it didn't really.
- With a few notable exceptions, the other avatars were forgettable.

**During the time you were involved in this course did you explore the Second Life world outside of the virtual classroom? If you answered "Yes", can you describe any ways in which this may have impacted your writing?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Lots of nature to wander through. I do have an in depth nature motif going on in my story. It's peaceful in some of the places I send my avatar to and I wonder where other avatars are.
- I did base my second submission on the SL world.
- Only for the one assignment where we had to collect snap shots. I spent way too much time looking for the perfect shots. Other than that, I didn't spend any time exploring.
- I only did so in a very limited manner. I quickly grew bored with the limited graphics and my general incomprehension of the point of the world. I prefer that any experiences with virtual worlds be left to console gaming. In short, it did not impact my writing because the writing I did in this class had already been lightly outlined before the beginning.
- N/A
- I was inspired by so many of the beautiful landscapes - I particularly liked the fairy tale location (not sure what its specific location name is), with the dragon-monster in the lake.
- I didn't explore it a lot and I don't think it impacted my writing.

Jan – April Group Comments:

- We were assigned a scavenger hunt at the beginning of the semester in which we had to explore the world. As I have little experience with virtual worlds,

**How would you compare the feedback you received in this course to feedback you receive in a real life classroom situation?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- I must honestly say I've never received such good feedback.
- I had very detailed feedback and strong encouragement in the RL fiction classes I took in CrWr. Kevin's feedback and steering of the course has helped me phenomenally at this point in my process.
- The professor is insistent on our emailing comments to him, which ensures that we will mail someone comments, if only to preserve a grade. A bit of an arm twisting system, yes, but it works very well.
- It felt very specialized and specific and I really appreciated everyone's honesty.
- There's more input from people in this format. People seem more willing to speak up than in a real life class.
- There was plenty of feedback from the students. However, because of the lack of cw majors in the class the effort and knowledge was poor.

Jan – April Group Comments:

- I haven't actually had any experience with receiving feedback in a real life classroom situation, so I can't answer this with any confidence.

- I don't really have a class to compare this experience to, but I can say that I have never had as much individual attention paid to my work as in this course. I felt like it was thorough and very helpful!
- written feedback was strong in this course, participants had to take time to prepare a written piece, not just a few notes on my drafts
- I liked that everyone in class was forced to say something. I dislike RL classes where half the class sits in silence.

**If you have studied with Kevin Chong in real life, how would you compare the experience to that of studying with Keith in Second Life?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- I have not had the pleasure of studying with him in real life as of yet.
- I haven't studied with Kevin Chong in real life.

Jan – April Group Comments:

- I have not studied with him in real life.
- The experience is definitely different, but just as good! Kevin is a very good mediator for workshopping, both in real life, and on Second Life.

**Please comment on how comfortable you were with the text-chat format?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Great!
- Fine. The box shows up across the page and up and down and I got stuck looking across today. It's hard on the eyes. Otherwise, I like the honesty here when we don't see the RL people.
- Very comfortable. It was easier than talking out loud.
- See above.
- I was very comfortable, having participated in forums previously.
- I liked it.
- I liked it.
- I was fairly comfortable with it, although I'll admit my typing speed isn't as fast as others...
- I was quite comfortable with the text-chat format.
- A little too unstructured for me

Jan – April Group Comments:

- Very! But I'm used to talking to people online. It made it so much easier for me to be brave enough to speak up. It was familiar to me, because I've received feedback through chat format for years. On the down side, as I already noted, one had no visual/audible clues as to the tone comments were being delivered in.
- Perfectly comfortable.
- I was very comfortable with the text-chat format, as text based communication is one of the most widely used forms of communication in our daily lives as well. The text-based feedback

allowed each student to provide a thorough analysis of the pieces being workshopped. Although it is possible for some thoughts to not be translated as effectively through text as they would be through speech,

- Again, only problem was trying to keep up with the pace due to the delay on my ancient computer.
- very, liked it
- very comfortable.

### **Do you have any recommendations about how to improve the format of this course?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- I think we're doing well right now. If I think of anything. I will let you know.
- It seems great to me right now.
- I think I preferred the earlier classes when we were only doing two stories each class. I felt like we were able to get more in depth with each piece. But I know that a lot of people wanted to submit three stories.
- I found that people were quite excited to talk at greater length, etc. Also, while some only submitted twice, as was required by the syllabus, some did so four times and most submitted three times. Some extra class time may be useful.
- Just to list spaces on campus where people can access powerful computers that support Second Life program.
- I feel like only allowing students to submit twice might help to make sure that everyone gets the individualized attention for each of their stories that they would like. It's frustrating when time is running out and you don't get to discuss your story as much as you'd like. I think perhaps making only two stories per class appropriate, and maybe doing more assigned readings or activities that force us to experience more in Second Life. Perhaps having to write a short story on an interaction we had with someone we met or a place we visited in SL??? Just some ideas!
- I quite like the course the way it is. Sometimes people get booted offline, or the screen gets really laggy, but that's probably due to computer/connection/internet issues and not due to Second Life itself. Sometimes I find it hard to get seated and my camera view is a little wonky, but other than these minor issues, I thought the virtual reality aspect of the course was great.
- I thought Kevin Chong did a great job stimulating discussion whenever it lagged and guiding the discussion, but I wished he did some actual lecturing about his experiences writing/the nuts and bolts of the craft. I really enjoyed this class and definitely want to take another Second Life course.
- The only problems are not being able to type as fast as the chat lines move. and lack of majors in the class
- I would prefer that a smaller proportion of the grade went to feedback and participation, and that less of the participation had to do with Second Life. I find that as a writing class, just about nine tenths of it should be in writing and rewrites. However, it was an extremely enriching class and I enjoyed it immensely

- Kevin is a great teacher. He is very honest and helpful and I think he should continue to teach the Second Life course!

Jan – April Group Comments:

- Hm. Icebreakers? Something to help the atmosphere of the class. Get us to talk to each other. You can have private chats with other people--I was too uncertain of people to actively open any on my own, because it felt like others didn't want to talk to me sometimes. But if that were required ... sort of like, pair up and talk about writing? Or why you took the course? That could have been discussed as a class too.
- none!
- class fieldtrips to other interesting venues.
- If it is something the class wants, reinforce that we should make our avatars very different
- I would say workshopping fewer stories each week to ensure we are not rushed. Also, the last class (real life) could be extended by an hour so we would have a bit more time to explore something about each class member
- -More weight to in-class interaction and feedback rather than emails/end-of-term feedback. I disagree with the idea of sharing written post-class feedback with anyone other than the author. Emailing them to the prof feels like I need to watch my word-count and not the quality of my responses.

**Do you have any comments on this evaluation format?**

Sept – Dec Group Comments:

- Long?
- It's okay.
- Great format!
- Nope

Jan – April Group Comments:

- I like it! Very thorough
- Although long, it is an effective way to get feedback on the course.
- nope!