

Society of information and education: virtual communities on the Internet

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Curs de lliure elecció: segon semestre curs 2003-2004
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Focus of the course

The Internet is used by millions of human beings who exchange e-mail, post articles, work and play together in on-line Virtual Communities without ever meeting face to face. Such virtual communities are expanding and diversifying in many different fields. This course offers a general review on the impact of informational society in education making special emphasis in the development of virtual communities. During the first part of the course, main concepts related to information society will be developed. The second part will be focussed on an historical overview of the virtual community, and will offer the chance to get involved personally with both text-based Multi-User Simulation Environments (MUSEs) and graphics-based virtual worlds. Lecture topics will include educational uses of virtual communities by children and adults, issues of virtual self-government, social changes, etc. It will be assumed that students are comfortable using computers and Internet.

Objectives

- To understand the main concepts and trends of information society
- To understand important features of online communication
- To analyse virtual communities
- To understand the impact and possibilities of virtual communities in different fields
- To design an on-line community

CONTENT

Methodology

Students will develop an assignment and a final paper or project on any topic related to virtual communities; during the beginning of the semester we will discuss possible project topics.

All documentation will be available online

During the course we will use two different type of sessions:

- Lectures

These sessions will be devoted to the development of the contents. The readings will be discussed and students will have the opportunity to clarify the information needed to complete the assignments

- Virtual sessions

Students will work on the project using virtual communities. The forum will provide shared group experience among those communities.

Course Requirements

- Reading: Students will be expected to have read all specifically-assigned materials prior to each week's discussion, since the discussion will be based on common knowledge derived from these readings.
- Attendance: Since most classes will involve both group discussion in the classroom and on line, regular attendance is an essential part of the course.
- Final Paper or Project: Every student will write a final paper or create a final project on a selected topic.

Evaluation

Weekly assignments will be graded "Complete/Incomplete" and collectively will account for 30% of the final grade.

Class participation, in both lectures and virtual sessions, will account for 10% of the grade.

The final paper or project will account for 60% of the grade, and will be evaluated on both the written report and an oral presentation to the class.

Bibliography

Renninger, A-Shumar,W (Eds) (2002). Building virtual communities. Learning and Change in Cyberspace. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Rheingold, H (1999). The virtual community. Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier, revised edition (available in: <http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/>)

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La comunidad virtual : una sociedad sin fronteras . Gedisa

Turkle, S. (1997) Life on the screen: identity in the age of Internet. New York: Touchstone

Preece, J. (2000) Online Communities: Designing Usability and Supporting Sociability. Wiley

Powazek, D.M. (2001) Design for Community: The Art of Connecting Real People in Virtual Places. New Riders

Examples of communities

Platform for Community Networks (<http://www.globalcn.org>)

Enredando (<http://www.enredando.com>)

Tapped in (<http://tappedin.org>)

Communities on the Web. <http://www.unrealities.com/web/comunity.htm>

The Best (Real) Communities on the Web. <http://www.compugraph.com/vircom.html>

Title: Net Gain Info Page.

<http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu/frames/groups/press/index.html>