



# Law Library E-Newsletter The Book Docket

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## Getting a Second Life

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### Virtual Harvard

Imagine waking up in the morning and teaching class without changing out of your pajamas. Imagine teleporting and flying to class instead of inching along 595. Imagine teaching a classroom of students who may have blue skin, purple wings, or the body of a raccoon. Peculiar as they sound, all of these things are now possible.

This fall, the Harvard Law School and the Harvard Extension School collaborated to offer the first law school course in a virtual world. While Harvard law students attend in person, Harvard Extension students and interested members of the public attend LAW 37271A “CyberOne: Law in the Court of Public Opinion” by going to a location called Berkman Island in the virtual world of Second Life. The course is designed to aid students in exploring “the creation and delivery of persuasive argument in the new integrated media space constituted by the Internet and other new technologies.”<sup>1</sup>

CyberOne is led by Professor Charles Nesson; his daughter, Harvard Law graduate and current computer science Ph.D. candidate, Rebecca Nesson; and Gene Koo, also a Harvard Law graduate, who is researching the educational potential of virtual worlds.<sup>2</sup>

Harvard isn't alone in exploring the possibilities of education in virtual worlds. Fifteen other colleges and universities, including New York Law School, own virtual islands in Second Life<sup>3</sup>, and there are at least 66 institutions with some Second Life

<sup>1</sup> *CyberOne: Law in the Court of Public Opinion*, HLS: COURSES (October 10, 2006), available at <http://www.law.harvard.edu/academics/courses/2006-07/?id=46342677>.

<sup>2</sup> *Course Description*, CYBERONE: LAW IN THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION, (2006), available at <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/cyberone/administration/course-description>.

<sup>3</sup> *Second Life: Universities and Private Islands*, SIMTEACH (last updated October 31, 2006) available at [http://simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Second\\_Life:\\_Universities\\_and\\_Private\\_Islands](http://simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Second_Life:_Universities_and_Private_Islands).

presence.<sup>4</sup>

### **Virtual Worlds?**

Virtual reality is here, but it's not what we thought it would be. Rather than mimicking sensory perception for individuals, it resembles a computer game and creates communities.<sup>5</sup>

Second Life, created in 2003, is the best known virtual world. Although it looks like a computer role-playing game, it is not. Aside from the terms of service and community standards, there are no rules, no quests, and no opponents. Every experience in Second Life is created by its nearly two million users. They build structures, start businesses, plan events, teach courses, share information, create games, network, and more.<sup>6</sup> Every character you see on the screen is controlled by a real person.

### **Why?**

While Second Life was not designed as an educational tool, it is another in a long line of technologies that have been embraced by educators to network with each other and to enrich the learning experience for students.

Second Life and other online worlds and games hold great appeal for the “digital native” Millennial generation. One way to reach out to our students is to meet them where they already are. Second Life is a great supplement to distance learning, allowing students and instructor to interact in a virtual physical environment that puts faces to the names—even if those faces and names are those of avatars. In a New York Times story this week, Rebecca Nesson noted that Second Life helps to form connections among students and professors that even the best distance-learning classes can't create, even allowing them to hang out outside of class time.<sup>7</sup>

Even if Second Life is not your cup of tea, it's still a development to be aware of. There are interesting legal questions about interactions both within the virtual world, and between the virtual and real worlds. Some of these questions addressed at a conference hosted by New York Law School in October 2004 included:

- How should the law treat digital creations?
- Can free speech be protected in the online environment?
- What is the future of virtual currency markets?
- How can we use virtual worlds for real world activism?

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<sup>4</sup> *Institutions and Organizations in SL*, SIMTEACH, (last updated December 7, 2006) available at [http://simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Institutions\\_and\\_Organizations\\_in\\_SL](http://simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Institutions_and_Organizations_in_SL).

<sup>5</sup> Edward Castronova, *SYNTHETIC WORLDS: THE BUSINESS AND CULTURE OF ONLINE GAMES* (University of Chicago Press 2005) at 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> *Is Second Life a MMORPG?* SECOND LIFE | FAQ (Linden Research Inc. 2006), available at <http://secondlife.com/whatis/faq.php#02>.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Lagorio, *The Ultimate Distance Learning*, N.Y. TIMES, January 7, 2007, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/07/education/edlife/07innovation.html>

<sup>8</sup> *Multiplayer Game Experts to Examine Legal Questions of Virtual Societies at 'State of Play: Reloaded' Conference*, NEW YORK LAW SCHOOL (October 20, 2004) available at <http://www.nyls.edu/pages/2845.asp>.

- What do race, gender and equality mean online?
- Should virtual worlds be regulated?<sup>8</sup>

The best way to explore Second Life is first hand. It's a large place, and as with any computer application, there is a learning curve. However, the best part of Second Life is that it's filled with people, including a thriving community of educators and librarians, who were once new to it and are happy to help other beginners. Check out [www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com), register, install the software, teleport in, and have fun!

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## Faculty & Staff Publications

**Linda J. Barris:** Mastering and Understanding Bluebook Citation: A Guide for Students and Practitioners, (Carolina Academic Press, Forthcoming 2007).

**Phyllis Coleman:** Florida Family Law: Text and Commentary – 2006 Statutes, (Carolina Academic Press 2006).

*Those Dreadful Liability Releases: Well, They Aren't Ironclad*, 21 UnderCurrent 14 (September, 2006).

**Robert W. Hudson:** *First Time in Second Life*. 7 (1) Connecting: The Newsletter of the Computing Services SIS, American Association of Law Libraries 6 (December 2006) at [http://www.aallnet.org/sis/cssis/newsletter/2006/2006\\_December.pdf](http://www.aallnet.org/sis/cssis/newsletter/2006/2006_December.pdf).

**Donna Carol Litman:** Florida Wills, Trusts, and Estates: Cases and Materials, (Carolina Academic Press 2007) (co-author).

**Elena Marty-Nelson:** Florida Wills, Trusts, and Estates: Cases and Materials, (Carolina Academic Press 2007) (co-author).

**Jani Maurer:** Florida Wills, Trusts, and Estates: Cases and Materials, (Carolina Academic Press 2007) (co-author).

**Joel A. Mintz:** Environmental Enforcement: Cases and Materials, (Carolina Academic Press, Forthcoming 2007).

*Closing Agency Libraries Deals Serious Blow*, Sun-Sentinel Opinion Editorial (Monday, December 11, 2006).

**Heddy Muransky:** *Academic Support – Super Sized*, AALS Section on Academic Support: The Learning Curve, Fall 2006.

**Gail Levin Richmond:** Florida Wills, Trusts, and Estates: Cases and Materials, (Carolina Academic Press 2007) (co-author).

**Eloisa Rodriguez-Dod:** Florida Wills, Trusts, and Estates: Cases and Materials, (Carolina Academic Press 2007) (co-author).

**John Sanchez:** State and Local Government Employment Liability, (Thomson-West, November, 2006) (co-author).

**Lisa Smith-Butler:** Law Librarianship in the Twenty-First Century, (Scarecrow Press, 2007) (co-author).

*Staying on Top: Electronic Current Awareness Resources for New Law Professors*, AALS New Law Professors Section Annual Newsletter, November 2006.