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## Firm taps university's Second Life expertise Princeton Review hosts SAT strategy sessions on Ohio's virtual campus

Jan 14, 2008

By Linda Lockhart

A campus visit often seals a prospective student's college choice. These days, a first visit may take on a different dimension -- a virtual one.

On two days this month, this Saturday and Jan. 31, high school students from around the globe can visit Ohio University's Second Life virtual campus and attend SAT strategy sessions sponsored by The Princeton Review. For the less technical among us, Second Life is an online world in which users create avatars -- virtual likenesses of themselves -- that can interact with the avatars of other users.

The Princeton Review, which offers private tutoring, classroom and online test prep to help students improve their college and graduate school admissions test scores, has added a number of high-tech options for test preparation, such as drills on iPods and calculators. The Second Life sessions are the company's first step into the virtual world to help students learn more about the SAT.

Michael Reiss, Princeton Review's online marketing manager, said he contacted a number of technology developers, but none had what he considered the means to build or implement the project. Then he turned to Ohio University's Virtual Immersive Technologies and Arts for Learning Laboratory, aka the VITAL Lab, and brainstormed with lab director Chang Liu, an assistant professor in the Russ College of Engineering and Technology.

"I saw that Ohio University was the obvious choice," Reiss said, "because not only could they develop and host the event, but they were highly knowledgeable and already heavily involved with building content for Second Life.

"I was sold that they would be a perfect match for us because our goals are very closely aligned," Reiss said, adding that both the university and the company reach out to a common audience of tech-savvy, college-bound students. "So far, I am very impressed with the work that has been done and technical knowledge of everyone on this project."

Ohio University was among the first universities to develop functioning campuses in Second Life. In the year since the

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Watch an OHIO Update video on Ohio University's presence in Second Life.

### Want to learn more about Second Life?

Ohio University Without Boundaries is helping the university and Athens communities learn how to get involved in Second Life.

OUIB will conduct free Second Life orientations at 2 p.m. every Friday through winter quarter in Stocker Center Lab 308. Sessions begin this week. Attendees will learn how to create an account and avatar in Second Life, basic operations for getting around and communicating "in world" and a bit about using Second Life as a tool for communication, education and business.

The sessions are open to students, faculty, staff and community members 18 and older. Participants will be required to sign into the lab with a guest account. No reservations

university purchased land in the virtual world, classes in subjects ranging from English to engineering have been conducted in Second Life. Groups such as the Ohio Minority Health Council and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency have helped develop learning activities for students. And the university was the first to extend the technology to middle school students by using Second Life to support interactive video games that help children grasp tough science concepts.

Liu, who developed Princeton Review's presence on the virtual campus, was instrumental in initially drawing attention to Second Life at Ohio University and is enthusiastic about projects such as the SAT sessions that have the potential to expand the university's reputation in the technology.

"I am excited about this project because this could be a new way for educational outreach in the future," Liu said.

Since the Second Life Grid, the virtual world's public space, is reserved for adults 18 years and older and a Teen Second Life is open only to 13- to 17-year-olds, Reiss said a decision had to be made on where to hold the SAT sessions.

"We felt that the audience ages straddled both the adult and teen grids and that we only wanted to tackle one grid for this event," Reiss said. "We want to capture the audience that is ready to be thinking about college, and the population of the adult grid is vastly larger than that of the teen grid. We have not ruled out the teen grid as a possibility in the future."

The Second Life SAT strategy sessions are at 4 p.m. Saturday and 8 p.m. Jan. 31. Each event will include a 15- to 20-minute presentation, followed by a Q&A session, and will feature two Princeton Review teachers in virtual form. Testing dates and content, sample questions and general information about the SAT, the ACT and the college admissions process will be covered.

While visiting the virtual campus, strategy session attendees also can learn more about Ohio University. The Office of Admissions will sponsor an information kiosk, and videos from the university's "Promise" academic marketing campaign will play on a screen nearby. Ohio University's virtual campus also hosts course support, games, student activities, arts programming and more.

Although virtual visitors may not walk on the bricks of the College Green, they will see an attractive rendering of the Athens campus. Ohio University's Second Life campus in many ways mimics real world one. The SAT strategy sessions will be held near virtual Stocker Center, which resembles the real-world West Green facility.

Building the virtual campus has been a collaborative undertaking, with several departments involved in the conceptualization and work. The Second Life campus currently includes two developed islands that serve as a virtual representation of the Ohio University campus and five undeveloped islands that will allow for campus expansion.

Christopher Keeseey, project manager for marketing and learning applications for Ohio University Without Boundaries, is among the

are necessary, but seating is limited.

For participants who want to continue learning about Second Life, advanced training sessions on specific topics will be offered by the [VITAL Lab](#). Attendees will be able to sign up during the orientations.

For more information, e-mail Meghan Loutitt at [ml237004@ohio.edu](mailto:ml237004@ohio.edu).

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university's Second Life architects.

"On an aesthetic level, we created the virtual campus in the spirit of the real campus to extend that Ohio University feeling to visitors as they walk around," Keesey said. "One of the benefits is that people who might never have a chance to come here are able to walk the sidewalks of the university."

Keesey said that while exterior views of the Second Life campus have the feel of the real world, interiors are more open to allow activities that are possible in Second Life, such as flying.

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#### **Related Links**

Visit the Ohio University Second Life campus

<http://slurl.com/secondlife/OHIO%20Outreach/173/76/25>

Watch an Ohio Update video on the topic

<http://www.ohio.edu/outlook/audio/secondlifevideo.cfm>

Watch a YouTube video on Ohio University's Second Life presence

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFuNFRie8wA>

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