CILASS in Second Life – looks rather different!

Second Life for CILASS

Information Studies Senior Lecturer Sheila Webber has reinvented herself as Sheila Yoshikawa in the virtual world Second Life – all in aid of a CILASS research project.

Welcome to cruciBL

Welcome to cruciBL, the CILASS newsletter. Before introducing this issue I should probably introduce CILASS itself. CILASS is a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning awarded to the University of Sheffield by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in April 2005 in recognition of excellence in inquiry-based learning (IBL). CILASS aims to make a major contribution to enhancing the student learning experience at the University of Sheffield by embedding inquiry at its heart.

The newsletter was conceived as a publication that will be both for and about participants in the CILASS community and networks at the University of Sheffield. It has been generated largely by those involved, both staff and students, rather than by CILASS core team staff. We hope that this comes through in the interesting stories that people have to tell about the projects that they are taking forward.

cruciBL aims to give you an idea of some of the creative and exciting IBL initiatives that are going on at the University of Sheffield and to encourage you to learn more about CILASS and IBL.

We would like to thank all of the contributors to this project and look forward to the next issue!

Philippa Levy,
Academic Director CILASS

In this issue...

Sheila's researching the educational possibilities of the virtual world by carrying out inquiry-based learning and information literacy activities there. A CILASS grant paid for an island, *Infolit iSchool* and the first students to use it are in their first year of the BSc Information Management.

As one of their class assignments, the students are asked to compare how Second Life residents use information with information behaviour models in the real world.

Sheila said: "For me, Second Life is a new learning and teaching space, more like a classroom than a website – but one where you and the students can redesign and rebuild the classroom overnight, and have tutorials sitting on the beach if you want.

"It has possibilities for engaging with people who are geographically distant, with a more personal feel than you get with phone or simple web chat. You can also create or buy all sorts of things in 3D, and I'm hoping that this might help to make research models and theory more tangible and involving.

"As well as teaching, I've been hosting a series of discussions on information literacy, inquiry and learning, and in my spare time I've opened a SL shop."

Sheila holds a tutorial in Second Life

Lyn Parker, from University of Sheffield Library, and Vicki Cormie, from St Andrew's University Library, are working with Sheila to facilitate the activities in Second Life. Which means they too have Second Life avatars.

Lyn joined Second Life over the summer, where she's known as Maggie Kohime. "I'm interested in what assistance students need in using a virtual 3D world, around the technology itself and information literacy. The present search tools are not very sophisticated and there is a definite need to be able to evaluate sites, avatars and information."

Factbox
Second Life...

Second Life (SL) is a virtual world, launched in 2003. Most things in SL have been made by its "residents": there are SL fashion designers, people who specialise in building houses, or making virtual coffee machines and so on. You can sign up and participate in SL for free, but you can also buy virtual land if you want to design your own environment. You are represented by an avatar, whose appearance you can change as much as you want.

Vickie Cormie has never met Lyn or Sheila in real life. She created her avatar, Ishbel Hartmann, out of personal curiosity a year ago but has become more interested in the practical applications for libraries. "I was delighted when Sheila asked me to become a teaching assistant and have very much enjoyed interacting with the students 'in world'. I have found it fascinating watching the different ways in which they react – some seem cautious and unsure and others seem to get it immediately."

In the next issue of cruciBL, find out what the students thought of their experience.

by Sheila Webber

IBL in the News

Planning is underway in the Department of Journalism Studies for the fifth annual election project. This year it'll involve all 86 taught postgraduate students on five separate courses reporting the local elections in England and Wales on May 1 2008.

The project helps students on MAs Print, Broadcast, Web and Magazine journalism develop their practical skills while students on MA Political Communication learn more about political analysis and how journalists work.

Over four days, the students will produce newspapers, radio and television programmes, and a website in real time to real deadlines. They will work as professional journalists would – reporting and analysing the political campaigns, covering and analysing the results.

It's the most ambitious attempt in the department to get students to use inquiry-based learning techniques collaboratively and individually. MA Broadcast Journalism Course Leader Marie Kinsey, who's also a CILASS Academic Fellow said: "One of the simplest definitions of journalism is "finding things out and telling people about them". So the most obvious way of teaching people to do journalism is exactly that – get them to find things out and tell others through writing about it or producing stories for radio and television.

"We haven't been calling it inquiry-based learning – but that's what it is."

Over the course of the project, tutors design the broad shape of the output, but students themselves must research the political map of the UK and the election issues and decide what stories they'll cover.

by Marie Kinsey
Department of Journalism Studies
CILASS Academic Fellow

Student Ambassadors – the Sound of Music

One of the most important roles within CILASS is taken by the students themselves. There is a network of 27 Student Ambassadors from departments involved in CILASS funded projects and they represent CILASS in the wider student community. Rosie Williamson, the Student Ambassador for Music, joined the Student Ambassador Network (SAN) in September. Here's her personal account of her experiences as a Student Ambassador so far.

"When I joined the SAN back in September I didn't really know what to expect. My role as a Student Ambassador is split into three strands: in the department, in a working group, and a general role as a member of the SAN as a whole.

"For my departmental role I am expected to liaise with my CILASS academic champion, Dr George Nicholson, and discuss CILASS activities in the Music department. My first meeting with George was very helpful. We discussed the fact that the Music department, due to the nature of the subject, is constantly engaging in inquiry-based learning and I was really interested to hear about the projects that CILASS is funding in the department. There are two CILASS projects underway in the Music department this year.

Joseph Tame, Barbara Webb and Rosie Williamson at Freshers' Fair 2007

Our collaboratory project helps music students to get involved with the cutting edge of music technology, composition and live computer art.

Rosie Williamson

It allows students to use technology to extend their ideas of composition and performance and helps to reduce the barriers between composition and performance.

The composition workshop inquiry project gives third year student composers the opportunity to take part in a series of workshops with professional musicians. They will not be limited by having to write music that could be performed by their peers as the professional musicians will have greater skill and performance experience than students.

"When I joined the SAN I had to decide which of the working groups I wanted to join. There are five groups which deal with different aspects of CILASS activities: Film, Journal, Evaluation, Information/Materials and Technology. I decided to join the Information/Materials group. The group helps to coordinate information and suggest ideas for content for the CILASS website and Newsletter (hence this article!). In the past the group has made a welcome pack for new student ambassadors which we will update and expand this year."

by Rosie Williamson
CILASS student ambassador for Music

The public health jigsaw

"How can health and development policies help village communities in The Gambia improve their quality of life?" That is the critical question confronting 34 international students from 17 different countries studying for their Masters in Public Health.

This is the second inquiry that students have tackled as part of their module in International Health Policy and Systems. Within days, and in some cases hours, of their arrival in the UK, they found themselves in nine small groups gathered in the latest CILASS collaboratory space trying to understand why both Conservative and Labour governments have been so keen to introduce private markets into UK health care.

As lecturers, we plunged students in at the deep end, and watched the diverse groups bond rapidly. The interaction of different knowledge, perspectives, and experiences produced some very stimulating and thoughtful presentations. Initial feedback from students has been mostly positive *"....very close to a real project a real life. We worked with complete strangers...I loved the challenge".*

CILASS funding, support and advice have been invaluable. The module is built around three health policy case studies – in Kerala, The Gambia and the UK – and inter-disciplinary working with colleagues in Geography and Sociological Studies has been a crucial element of building our approach and our case studies.

There's still a long way to go, but the constant student feedback is really helpful to keep developing the approach.

by Graham Jones
ScHARR

The Great Robot Challenge

Is Number 5 alive?

Intro week for students in the department of Automatic Control and Systems Engineering (ACSE) came with a difference this year – they had to build a robot and get it to work.

To help students with the transition from school to university, ACSE wanted to start students on the path to inquiry and independent learning. They also wanted intro week to be fun, so came up with three ideas.

First there was an open-ended, investigative pre-arrival task, then a competitive, group project involving Lego Mindstorms robots, followed by a group "learning trail" exercise with students making use of a wide variety of resources for information about University life.

Staff and students worked together to prepare the tasks. Supported by a CILASS grant, ACSE employed Aseem Raina, a third year undergraduate, to design the Lego Mindstorm project and supporting resources. Staff members prepared the pre-arrival task and the learning trail exercise. During Intro Week, six second year undergraduate students acted as "experts".

First, build your robot…

The robot kits were chosen due to their versatility, cost and simplicity. For instance the programming environment was user friendly and graphic based, and required no previous knowledge of programming. It was also very clearly "systems engineering". Each kit came with several different sensors and three motors, which gave a good range of functionality.

Then, get it to do something….

The students competed to make their robots navigate a course as quickly as possible, performing some tasks en route (see left). The challenge was carefully designed to be fun and to facilitate group work within time limitations and to match skills development with activities. The students won points as the robots completed tasks along the way.

The independent learning angle was reinforced by the distribution of resources, many of which were only available on the intranet or in the Information Commons. Students were encouraged to seek these out in advance - but some could be purchased on the day, at the cost of some points! For example, staff advice was also only available at a cost!

The groups were chosen at random, which resulted in a mix of people from different backgrounds and different interests. Groups that progressed fastest were ones that had delegated sub-tasks to different people. All the groups seemed very engaged and highly competitive.

Student feedback on the robot competition was very positive. Typical responses were: "Useful. It made me know more about how to cooperate with others"; "It was very challenging but great fun". "It was a good opportunity to adjust to new ways." Staff also asked what students thought they had learned. "Teamwork." "An engineering way of thinking"; "Time management very important."

The learning trail exercise and pre-arrival task were equally welcomed. Students said they were able to find their way round the university "while having fun" and that the pre arrival task was a good way of getting an insight into Systems Engineering.

by Aseem Raina, student, Linda Gray, ACSE staff, Anthony Rossiter, ACSE staff and Mark Morley, CILASS staff

Which way now? Getting to grips with a robot

> *Inquiry based learning is a happy contrast to the traditional teaching methods and I am certainly enjoying being a part of this process. There of course could be an inherent bias to my stand i.e. the very traditional resistance to being "educated"; being force fed ideas and facts.*
>
> *A very democratic, out of box approach; use of international body as resources along with a whole host of interactive participatory tools make the International Health: Systems and Policy Module (IHM) a truly rewarding choice especially for mid career students as it enables them to develop "newer" skill sets, exposes them to topical research allowing them to apply theory to practice and vice versa – for others it is opportunity to learn from a shared pool of experience.* **Anshu Mohan, Student**

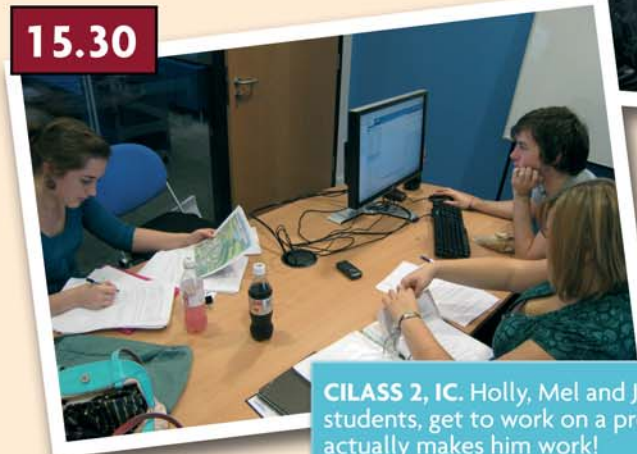*Sowing the seeds of good health in the Gambia*

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

by Jamie Wood, Sarah Gold (Architecture) and Natalie Whelan (Geography)

16.10

Bartolomé House collaboratory. Russian Studies students enjoy a relaxing coffee after collaboratively researching Russian grammar. One student describes the room as 'dead posh'!

15.30

CILASS 2, IC. Holly, Mel and John, third year Geography students, get to work on a project. John says the space actually makes him work!

15.00

Collaboratory 2, IC. Groups of English Language and Literature MA students work on a historical language question. Lecturer Jane Hodson says the technology offers 'the perfect opportunity to get students working with research materials'.

13.45

CILASS social space, IC. Sport and Recreation Management students work on a group project on accounting and finance; the area is a 'perfect place to sit'.

CILASS

CILASS has invested a lot in its learning spaces. But how are these spaces being used day-to-day? What do staff and students think of them? We eavesdropped on some of the things that went on in the CILASS spaces in the Information Commons (IC) and Bartolomé House on just one day.

CIBL

11.25

Collaboratory 2, IC. English students in a seminar for Duco van Oostrum's Tales of the City module. At the end of every class the students draw something related to the text they have just read. One student said: "It's a nice, fun, different way to experience what you have just read".

12.30

Collaboratory 1, IC. Second Year Spanish students on David Wood's Contemporary Cuba module give a presentation on the Cuban education system and take questions.

13.30
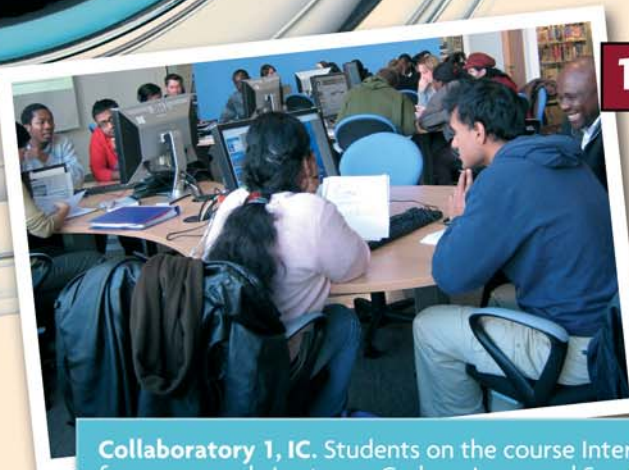
Collaboratory 1, IC. Students on the course International Public Health use the space for group work. Lecturers Graham Jones and Sarah Barnes say the space is 'inviting', technologically advanced and "perfect" for groupwork.

BLOGGING
- A NEW WAY OF **STORYTELLING?**

Brendan Stone of the School of English is a CILASS Academic Fellow who has become intrigued by the world of blogs. Here he explains how they have brought together his research and teaching and sparked the student imagination.

"Over the past semester undergraduate students in my module *Identity/Crisis: Narrative, Self, Trauma* are researching the phenomenal rise of weblogging and considering whether this form of writing is a new narrative genre.

Workshops have been held in the CILASS collaboratory in which groups of students to monitor several blogs over the course of a semester. Each student research group has its own group blog on the course MOLE site on which they post reflections and discuss their thoughts with each other.

It means students must become researchers in a relatively unstudied area, as well as getting the freedom to choose their own research focus. At the end of the semester each group will post a summary report analysing their blogs, proposing tentative conclusions, and suggesting future research questions.

This is the second year in which this project has run. I initiated it because of my own interest in blogging and it took shape following meetings with Phil Levy, CILASS Academic Director.

Student research questions have included: how the private and public realms interact in blogging; whether blogs *are* narratives, and if so what characteristics define them; and how dialogue in the form of comments affects the presentation of self.

Last year the work produced was of a very high standard and advanced knowledge in this area. My aim this year is to help those students who are interested in taking this further to get their research published in a scholarly journal, possibly in a collaborative piece with me."

Blogging doesn't stop students talking to each other!'

PODCASTING – SPREADING THE WORD

If you thought podcasting was the preserve of internet geeks and techno savvy teenagers think again. It could help with learning and teaching and earlier this semester 90 members of staff went to find out how.

A Learning and Teaching Services lunchtime Spotlight session hosted by Graham MacElearney (LeTS) and Mark Morley (CILASS) explained everything you ever wanted to know about podcasting but never dared ask – what it is, how to produce podcasts, and what they can be used for in learning and teaching.

Graham and Mark demonstrated a wide range of hardware and software for podcasting. To show how easy it is to produce a podcast, they recorded an audio file on a laptop, exported it as an mp3, and uploaded it to a hosting site being trialled by the University. They generated a podcast feed, loaded it into iTunes and played it. Easy.

The automation of the process is the significant element of podcasting and is one of the reasons why there has been a media explosion on the internet, which some have called 'the democratization of media'. It places the 'listener' in control of the information they want to receive and when they listen to or view it. And, because the technology is so straightforward, it's easy for anyone to get started.

So there is potential for lecturers to develop additional support materials for courses or tap into the wealth of material that already exists. Students could use podcasting as a different route to knowledge construction, either individually or collaboratively. And podcasting could be used in a similar way to how blogs are currently used in courses.

Welcome to the future.

by Mark Morley
CILASS

Factbox
Podcasting Explained...

Podcasting is really a way of downloading audio, video or other files (like pdf) to any computer or portable media player in a way that is easy for the 'listener'. Instead of having to repeatedly access a web page to see if there are updates, the software does it all automatically

For further information or advice about podcasting and its potential in learning and teaching, you can contact Mark Morley, email m.morley@sheffield.ac.uk

Joseph meets a stray samurai whilst competing in the non-stop 100km Oxfam Japan Trailwalker hiking challenge

Home and Away:
IBL on the Year Abroad

Students and staff from across the university's language departments came together at a CILASS IBL cafe session in early November to discuss new projects aimed at helping students get the most out of their year as exchange students at partner institutes abroad.

The main thinking behind this meeting was to put the emphasis on us, the returning students, to enable us to talk freely with Level 2 students, we talked about not only our academic experiences, but also off-campus adventures, such as being looked after by a friendly *babushka* in a tiny village in the middle of Russia and making a national TV debut alongside one of Japan's most famous actresses!. It is hoped that this will encourage and reassure them as they prepare to leave the UK.

One of the ideas being considered within the Russian Department is for all students to keep a diary (in Russian) in the time leading up to, during, and after their Year Abroad. This could then form a part of assessment; as it would be read by both teachers and personal tutors not *too* much detail would be required. Keeping a

diary would enable students to not only keep a record of all their foreign adventures, but also help them to practice writing in their target language – hopefully about a time in their lives they're really enjoying.

Meanwhile, the School of East Asian Studies has equipped its exchange students with MP3 Voice recorders, enabling them to capture the sounds of Japan. It is planned to pair-up these level 3 students with first years, facilitating joint research projects, giving those in the UK an idea of what they can expect of life in Japan, and encouraging level 3 students to explore their new surroundings.

The IBL café provided an excellent opportunity for the sharing of these ideas, and plans are now in place for all language departments to work closely together to implement and refine the new projects.

by Joseph Tame and Lucie Hill
CILASS student ambassadors, School of East Asian Studies, Russian and Slavonic Studies

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BUILDING IBL FROM SCRATCH

Flyer for the house party

On 8th and 9th November 2007 the Architecture department held its annual 'Whole School Event' to unite the architecture year groups by a series of exhibitions, exciting projects and group workshops.

Undergraduate students took part in the culmination of the Diploma students' 'Live Projects.' The Event promotes inter-connection between year groups and awareness of how the Live Projects work. And it can stimulate discussion and investigation by everyone.

The projects covered a huge range. One worked with Architecture Aid in Sudan to research the suitability of constructing mud bricks using human urine as the binding agent. Another investigated how to develop a greener education within the City School in Sheffield.

CILASS student ambassador Sarah Gold was involved in promoting the 'Romania' project, in which nine diploma students worked with the F.A.S.T charity to improve the housing situation of the Roma people.

Working in groups they helped plan the 'Big Fat Roma House Party' fundraising event for the project. The activity was self directed, therefore inquiry-based, and very challenging. The students had to blend the ideas of all of the members of the group in order to form a coherent proposal.

Their advertising efforts resulted in posters and a Facebook 'Event Invitation'. One undergraduate student said: 'The involvement in the live projects was enjoyable, and showed the kind of challenges we have to look forward to in the future.'

by Sarah Gold
CILASS student ambassador for Architecture

Buddy up with CILASS

About a dozen members of staff are taking part in a CILASS "buddy" scheme, where they observe one another's classroom practice, and use this as a starting-point for discussing the various uses and understandings of IBL.

This fits with other institution-wide best practice programmes like peer observation of teaching, Learning and Teaching Exchange activities. It helps Sheffield to become a *inquiring institution*, where good ideas are publicised and taken further, and the interface of research and teaching is actively discussed.

Tim Herrick, of the Institute for Lifelong Learning, said: "One of the great joys of working in a university is the range of exciting, innovative, and creative teaching that goes on across the institution; and one of the great frustrations is being able to learn more about it.

"Tim has observed learning activities organised by Susi Clark in the School of Architecture. Her Level Two programme is based on small groups of students working closely with studio tutors on project briefs that are outlined, but not controlled by the centre.

Individual tutors modify briefs to play to their strengths, or pitch them in ways to appeal to their studio group. The flexible brief system means that processes and products are different enough to produce creative energies and interactions, but similar enough to form a common core of discussion. For Tim, "The work being done in Architecture represents excellent inquiry-led, creative, responsive teaching going on in the University, and to see some of it first-hand was a deeply rewarding experience."

by Tim Herrick
Institute for Lifelong Learning

Dragons return to their Roots

If you have ever known that sense of dread just before a vital presentation, then spare a thought for the English students who faced a real *'Dragon's Den'* style experience in the CILASS space in Bartholomé House.

Students on the English module *Roots Routes: Eight Things to do with a Text* had to 'pitch' their ideas for turning Alex Haley's novel *Roots* into a number of different formats, such as a theatre production or a musical, to a panel of experts in a format described by the lecturers as "a cross between Dragons' Den and X-Factor".

The first thing the students encountered as they entered the room was a row of experts wearing serious, set expressions. It was a formidable line-up, made up of experts in Media, Education and English and CILASS student representatives. They sat ready to give a startlingly realistic "dragon's den" type responses.

Each group of students had precisely 10 minutes to sell their adaptation of the book using PowerPoint to get across their ideas more realistically. The panel took 5 minutes to discuss the "pitch" then called the group back into the room to give them the verdict.

The research and application of knowledge that had gone into particular presentations was immense. The majority of pitches were "funded" and got high marks.

The presentation that stood out in terms of creative engagement and research application was a theatrical adaptation to be staged in the university drama studio. The students' attention to staging details and their decision to donate the proceeds to charity highlighted both their practical awareness of theatre as a genre and their sensitivity to the historical and contemporary issue that a subject like slavery poses.

Despite the anxiety and the nerves felt by all students at the time, the overall feeling was one of enjoyment. Not only did the students find it much more interesting and involving compared to the standard traditional lecture format, but also a fantastic opportunity to work closely with fellow students and staff to get plenty of face-to-face interaction. One student said: "This activity made me feel a lot more satisfied compared with handing in a regular written assignment." Every group remarked that the CILASS spaces offered a fantastic opportunity to engage with a wide range of technology and was helping them to develop skills that can be used in their future studies.

One of the 'Dragons', Steve Collier (LeTS), who sat on the panel as a media expert was very impressed by the quality of the ideas presented. "Several concepts deserve to be pursued and on more than one occasion the panel was sorry not to be real 'Dragons' - we didn't have any money!" he said.

"What was really impressive was the amount of work and effort the students had put into this exercise, and it seemed to me and other panel members that the process of planning and preparing a 'pitch' encouraged students to examine the book and it's relevance and context a bit more closely than they may otherwise have done."

by Donna Helen and Laura Howard
CILASS student ambassadors for English Literature and Economics

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How to get involved

CILASS has a strategic aim of building on and extending teaching excellence in inquiry-based learning at the University of Sheffield. It offers two grant schemes that give academic staff the opportunity to take forward learning and teaching development and research projects in inquiry-based learning. There is a rolling programme of engagement over the five year cycle of CILASS, with each school or department in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences offered two opportunities to bid for funding for development projects. The IBL Grant Scheme is open to members of academic staff from any department in the University who wish to take forward an inquiry-based learning development project; invitations to bid for funds are made on a twice yearly basis. Funding is also available to CILASS academic champions, project leaders and colleagues to attend IBL related events and conferences.

Wanted:
Competition Winner!

Nearly 300 students and staff entered our *'Name the Newsletter'* competition during Intro Week. Out of a long list of entries the judges chose 'Crucible' as the winner. The winning entrant was Tejal Patel, from the Management School. Unfortunately we have not been able to contact Tejal to hand over the winner's £50 Amazon voucher. If you know him, please tell him to get in touch with us!

Our judges' second choice was 'Enable'. The four entrants who suggested this name are each entitled to £10 Amazon voucher. They are: Cedric Krummes (Germanic Studies); Janine Bijsterbosch (Psychology); Eleanor Purkis (English Literature); and Raghav Munjal (Dentistry). They have all collected their prizes!

by Jamie Wood

The University Of Sheffield.