

National Defense University  
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### **NDU iCollege's Virtual Worlds Conference Heads towards the Future**

(Washington, DC) On May 12-13, 2011, the National Defense University (NDU) iCollege hosted the Fourth Annual Federal Consortium for Virtual Worlds Conference (FCVW), held at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, D.C. Several hundred people attended on campus and many more in-world using one of four different virtual world platforms (web.alive, VastPark, 3Dxplorer, and Second Life). A variety of avatars, networking opportunities, dynamic speakers, and panel discussions educated and entertained attendees. A 1-day pre-conference workshop, held on May 11, gave participants an opportunity to learn basic virtual worlds' designs and uses. The FCVW was established in July 2007 by the NDU iCollege to explore multi-agency and intra-agency collaboration using the robust capabilities of virtual worlds, and it has grown to over 2,000 members.

The formal conference began with an avatar-infused video featuring Dr. Robert Childs, Chancellor of the NDU iCollege, setting the conference framework and underlining the need to “work smarter, have open access to information, and reduce the carbon footprint.” Dr. Childs welcomed conference participants and told the audience that, “Now is the right time for technology, education, immersion and training – despite budget cuts. The future is now! We’re at a crossroads of change and through collaboration and tackling the hot topics like cyber education and cyber defense, and using augmented reality, 3D, motion and visuals – this will bring us together.”

Keynoting the conference were four authorities on virtual worlds, sharing their experiences, projects, and perspectives:

- David Smith, a computer scientist and entrepreneur who invented “The Colony,” the first 3D interactive game. He gave details on some of his work such as the ICE -1994 collaborative 3D working environment, and the LMC GTL Holowall 2011, which he believes will be the “augmented platform of the future.”
- Ms. Mk Haley, a Faculty and Associate Executive Producer at the Entertainment Technology Center of Carnegie Mellon University, spoke about her experiences with Disney and Carnegie Mellon and showed an example of the “Marshmallow Challenge,” as she compared experiences with virtual worlds – one of the modern settings for innovative-team collaboration.
- Dr. Chris Dede, Professor in Learning Technologies at Harvard University, offered expertise in information technology for immersive learning across space, time, and multiple interactive media. He shared how middle school students are learning about ecosystems through immersive virtual worlds and how technology is helping students excel in the real world.
- Mr. Frank C. DiGiovanni, Director of Training Readiness and Strategy in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Readiness), provided oversight on the Live, Virtual and Constructive Training Standards and the development of virtual world

training. Mr. DiGiovanni listed three reasons why the DoD is in favor of virtual worlds capabilities: 1) limited resources and budget cuts are a driver, 2) increased tools for training/simulations/collaboration, and 3) the future work force is digitally, socially connected.

Several panel discussions featured subject matter experts who presented multiple examples of their virtual world experiences, including discussions about the following: 1) How virtual worlds help soldiers who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); 2) Command and control models and simulations for training the military; 3) The “Cairo 2 Kansas” virtual world project piloted by the State Department; 4) Virtual worlds and augmented reality bringing communities of people together to learn emergency response skills; and 5) Cybersecurity complexities within government and how this affects virtual worlds environments and implementation.

Participants attending the FCVW2011 Conference at the NDU campus were given the opportunity to sign up for a MingleStick. Akin to an electronic business card, the MingleStick is a social ice breaker and conversation starter while serving as a business utility tool for digitally exchanging contact information and social media profiles. With the click of a button, attendees at the FCVW event connected with each other. After the 2-day conference, attendees could log in to an online account to view their connections containing profile pictures (facial recognition), business contact information, social media profiles, 'about me' descriptions, and more. Approximately 2,000 mingle connections were made at the two day virtual worlds' event.

People who could not attend the conference in person participated virtually through as many of the hosted virtual world instances as they desired. Each virtual world setting offered a dynamic and unique experience to the participant. 3DXplorer held the first ever 3D government virtual poster session; Vast Park offered a robust social network with a continuous virtual stream; Tech Wizards had a virtual PDA where participants could set-up a live tweet within the virtual world and participate in the FCVW11 tweet stream; National Center for TeleHealth and Technology (T2) coordinated a world-wide student blog and enabled participants to experience the varied effects of PTSD; and Avaya shared their virtual world via Flash enabling users to be in a virtual world without having to perform a download or have additional open ports, since it is browser-based, thus being accessible to a wide audience. In addition, Metanomics, sponsored by TreetTV (a Second Life Television Network), hosted the conference stream, as did the NDU iCollege's IRMC Island (the main conference sponsor). IRMC Island also challenged participants to a virtual scavenger hunt. Meanwhile, on campus, a vendor fair in Marshall Hall showcased virtual world technologies featuring products and services from several companies involved in virtual worlds' technologies. The conference ended with an awards presentation given by Dr. Paulette Robinson, founder of the FCVW, and Dr. Keysha Gamor, NDU iCollege faculty member. To learn more about the FCVW, log on to: <http://www.ndu.edu/icollege/fcvw/>.

Virtual Worlds in NDU iCollege Courses – Besides hosting the annual FCVW conference, the college uses virtual worlds to teach courses in Web Enabled Government, Critical Information Systems Technology, and Multi-Agency Collaboration. Students are introduced to the “Second Life” virtual platform and are given a tour of the NDU iCollege IRMC Island where they create their avatars and learn about immersive technology. In one college course, Distributed Learning (DL) students from three time zones collaborated virtually in a debate chamber held in Second

Life. Currently, the CFO Academy is participating in a pilot program using the VastPark virtual world platform. Teaching this way brings interactive learning to a new level within government.

About the College – The NDU iCollege, a U.S. DoD educational institution, prepares leaders to direct the information component of national power by leveraging information and information technology for strategic advantage. Although most students come from DoD (military and civilians), the school also accepts Federal Agency and international students into its graduate programs. Education is focused around CIO, CFO, Information Assurance/Cyber, Enterprise Architecture, IT Project Management, and other information leadership competencies. The NDU iCollege also has been awarded degree granting authority from the U.S. Department of Education for its new Government Information Leader (GIL) Masters of Science Degree. Students are already active in the program and new applications will be accepted soon. Courses are completed on campus and/or online. For more information about the NDU iCollege's programs, please contact: Jolly Sienda at [jolly.sienda.ctr@ndu.edu](mailto:jolly.sienda.ctr@ndu.edu); or for general information about the college, visit: [www.ndu.edu/icollege](http://www.ndu.edu/icollege).

About the University – The National Defense University is the nation's premier center for joint professional military education. The university is an accredited graduate-level institution that provides an educational and research environment to prepare future leaders of the armed forces and civilian agencies for high-level policy, command, and staff responsibilities. For more information about the National Defense University, please contact: Dave Thomas, Public Affairs Officer, at 202-685-3140 or [ThomasD2@ndu.edu](mailto:ThomasD2@ndu.edu); or visit [www.ndu.edu](http://www.ndu.edu).

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