

HK PolyU puts library in Second Life

By [Kelly Ng](#) | 25 August 2009

Students of Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HK PolyU) have been walking, flying and even teleporting from section to section within the new university library. The virtual library, built on the Second Life platform, is the first of its kind in Asia.

Most libraries in this region are still focusing on aggressively digitising content. The National Library in Kolkata – the largest library in India – is going through a massive digitisation effort. It has digitised 9140 books and converted close to 180,000 records into machine-readable formats, and is planning to make them available online before the end of 2009.



“As for a virtual library, we will have to consider it in future after the basic digitisation phase is completed,” shared Aresh Ghatak, Library and Information Officer, National Library, Belvedere, Kolkata in India.

HK PolyU’s multi-user virtual library environment simulates the experience of real-time interaction in a shared three-dimensional virtual world. Each student uses an avatar which can explore the virtual library – to sit through a presentation, read an e-book, walk around an exhibition, or chat with the librarian.

“We know that all 25,000 students use the internet. So why confine the library to the physical building? This virtual library on Second Life allows us to reach out to our clientele,” Steve O’Connor, University Librarian, HK PolyU told FutureGov. “At the peak of the traffic, we had 453 visits in a month.”

There were several technical challenges, particularly due to the fact that Second Life originates from the US. Having the server sit in the US means that the system can be unstable at times. The support team also runs on US West Coast time, so whenever there is a problem, HK PolyU needs to wait half a day to resolve it. Another key issue is the need for strong broadband and the right graphic card.

Looking ahead, O’Connor plans to allow students to design their own ideal virtual libraries and hire a Reference Librarian in Second Life to provide instant assistance.