Rockcliffe University Consortium

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Abstract: Rockcliffe University Consortium is an online non-profit organization dedicated to the development of knowledge emergence, organizational design, and leadership and technical studies based on virtual collaborative environments (VCE). The institution provides technical programs, business forums, research, and facilities management based on VCE. We provide support to other organizations looking to understand the nature of VCEs and how to effectively integrate these capabilities both strategically and operationally.

Our services include virtual content creation, delivery of training programs to faculty and students in understanding VCEs, and research into new methods of education and training which effectively utilize 3D spaces. This product/services showcase will demonstrate some of the advantages to academic institutions in partnering with Rockcliffe in order to more effectively deliver content to their faculty and students.

Background

Rockcliffe University Consortium (RUC) was developed as an experiment in the use of 3D environments for providing distance education. Started by Kevin Feenan in 2006, the non-profit organization grew swiftly to 1400 group members and a faculty of 15 volunteers. Faculty included both formal academics, Ph.D.s, doctoral students, tenured professors, and novice instructors. In April 2008, Rockcliffe formally registered as a non-profit entity in the state of California. In January 2009 Rockcliffe submitted a 501c3 application (currently pending).

Over the past three years Rockcliffe has been a model for organizations looking to develop courses and educational training within the Second Life environment. Rockcliffe was one of the first "in-world" schools to offer formalized training, rather than one-off workshops, with dedicated knowledge objectives in mind for students taking RUC programs.

Rockcliffe has leveraged quality assurance standards for experiential education based on PADI's (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) educational model. The PADI training methodology has been recognized in over 150 countries around the world as representing a consistently high standard of quality for both tacit and explicit based knowledge transfer with above average retention. Rockcliffe has adapted PADI's methodology to the virtual environment and has seen correspondingly high results with RUC students being able to progress to professional content developers for a wide variety of 3D projects.

Rockcliffe's services include 3D content creation for those colleges and universities that do not have the in-house expertise to develop their own environment from scratch. Rockcliffe provides training and mentorship to faculty and students of other colleges and universities in understanding and overcoming the learning challenges of working within a virtual environment. Additionally, Rockcliffe has been instrumental in conducting practical research into effective use of virtual environments and their implications.

Rockcliffe is also a highly respected member of the formal academic community having been instrumental in the organization and management of academic conferences including the Virtual Worlds Best Practices in Education Conference and the Second Life Communities Conference in addition to several smaller conferences. Rockcliffe faculty have been published in a variety of peer review publications and symposia including at eLearn 2007 and 2008.

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