

FAS Unveils Virtual Worlds Almanac Wiki

By Monica Amarelo

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The Federation of American Scientists unveiled an ambitious infrastructure for cataloging virtual environments called the Virtual Worlds Almanac. This wiki classifies virtual worlds and includes links to tools, news, and online reference materials.

FAS Unveils Virtual Worlds Almanac Wiki

-- Visit the wiki here: http://vworld.fas.org/wiki/Main_Page --

WASHINGTON DC – Do you know the difference between Active Worlds and Whyville? Curious to learn how your simulation of racing sailboats will work in There instead of Second Life? The Federation of American Scientists unveiled an ambitious infrastructure for cataloguing virtual environments called the Virtual Worlds Almanac (http://vworld.fas.org/wiki/Main_Page). This wiki currently classifies 74 virtual worlds and includes extensive links to tools, news, and other useful online reference materials.

There is great potential for virtual worlds to facilitate the development and testing of powerful new learning technologies. A virtual world is a computer-based simulated environment. Users inhabit and interact via avatars, or computer-generated characters.

“People worldwide can edit and contribute to this comprehensive guide to virtual worlds,” said Henry Kelly, President of the Federation of American Scientists. “We hope this wiki will make it easier for the community to collaborate and to keep abreast of innovations and new product offerings. FAS is interested in the potential virtual worlds offer for educational and learning.”

The FAS Learning Technologies Program built the Virtual Worlds Almanac as a one-stop guide for information on the structure and capabilities of these sites. The wiki includes the engines used to create these simulated environments and related information like news, reviews and other links.

“Many features of the FAS Virtual Worlds Almanac enable visitors to learn more about virtual worlds. The ‘feature finder’ permits users to browse through each world based on their interests,” said Bruce Milligan, FAS Learning Technologies Project Manager. “Users can narrow their searches by filtering through more than 30 variables like purpose, platform, language, and year released.”

Virtual world developers, academics and the general public who use the listed worlds are encouraged to review, modify, and contribute to the wiki. FAS invites all users to create new listings for virtual worlds not already included. A template simplifies the process of adding and revising information. There are also forms to upload screenshots, news articles, external links, and more.

Most of the data in the Virtual Worlds Almanac is entered via checkboxes, drop-down lists, and specific textboxes, and supported variables include those related to use, technical features, communication, and demographics. All the information added by visitors will contribute to the serious research that will benefit all who have an interest in the Internet and its educational potential.

“The system used to create the virtual worlds feature finder is infinitely expandable,” said Michelle Lucey-Roper, director of the FAS Learning Technologies Program. “Anyone can edit and contribute to the Virtual Worlds Almanac. In fact, one of our primary intentions is the collaborative growth of the wiki.”

All content is released using a GNU Free Documentation License. For additional information, or to see the new site, visit the FAS Virtual Worlds Almanac Wiki site at: http://vworld.fas.org/wiki/Main_Page.

NOTE TO REPORTERS –

To schedule an interview with Henry Kelly, President of the Federation of American Scientists, Michelle Roper, Director of the FAS Learning Technologies, or Bruce Milligan, Learning Technologies Project Manager, please contact Monica Amarelo at email mamarelo@fas.org or call 202-454-4680.

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The Federation of American Scientists (www.fas.org) was formed in 1945 by atomic scientists from the Manhattan Project. Endorsed by 70 Nobel Laureates in biology, chemistry, economics, medicine and physics as sponsors, FAS addresses a broad spectrum of national security issues in carrying out its mission to promote humanitarian uses of science and technology. The FAS Learning Technologies Project works on strategies to harness the potential of emerging technologies to improve how we teach and learn.

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