The Peabody Bulletin

A Virtual Night at the Museum

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A Virtual Night at the Museum:
Technology Taking LSU Museum’s Show on the Road

More and more people are delving into the world of virtual life simulations. Programs like “The Sims” interact with Internet audiences by getting users to “micro manage” the lives of make-believe or virtual people. With a sales record of 70 million copies worldwide, “The Sims” illustrates the success of virtual applications.

LSU faculty are now tagging on to this popular technology with an education twist. It’s called the Virtual Museum and was funded by a $38,000 grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents.

Because of a collaborative effort between the French Education Project and the Museum of Natural Science, teachers across the state will have access to a virtual museum through compressed video distance learning at seven sites stretching from New Orleans to Shreveport.

In addition to expanding the professional networking capabilities of science and French immersion teachers, the virtual museum will also provide training in the use of online materials and technology to under served, rural areas of the state – many of which were affected by the 2005 hurricanes.

“With a virtual museum, K-8 science and French immersion teachers will have access to LSU’s immense collection of natural science specimens and rich academic expertise,” said College of Education Professor Denise Egéa-Kuehne, the principal investigator on the grant.

Egéa-Kuehne co-wrote the grant with Sophie Warny, the education director for the LSU Museum of Natural Science, and Arnaud Sgambato, director of the French Education.
Project’s National Resource Center for Teachers of French.

To kick off the grant, the researchers organized a one-day orientation on the LSU campus for “facilitators,” or teachers that will foster discussions at their sites and lead participants to work in small groups to create innovative classroom activities based on the presentations.

Egéa-Kuehne, Warny, and Sgambato offered examples of creative, content-rich curriculum ideas with hands-on pedagogical activities to utilize LSU’s special collections. For instance, in one activity the researchers capitalized on the museum’s bird collection to discuss books, possible specimen loans, scope-on-the-rope activities, and even a classroom exercise in which the students learned to eat like a bird and build nests.

“The LSU Museum of Natural Science boasts the fourth-largest university-based bird collection in the world, rivaling that of Harvard, Berkeley, and Michigan,” said Warny. “It is a wonderful opportunity for us to share these resources with teachers in Louisiana, taking them virtually behind the door to see our collections, find out details about our curators, and learn some fun facts about each collection.”

The bird collection is one of many resources on campus. The museum also has 81,000 reptile and amphibian specimens, including one of the largest and most diverse snake species skeletal collections in the world. The museum holds more than 20,000 fossil specimens, 1.25 million archaeological specimens and 270,000 fish specimens. The museum also hosts one of the world’s largest frozen tissues collection. The mammal collection currently holds more than 37,000 specimens, and is among the 20 largest in the nation. And, the museum collaborates with the LSU Department of Geology & Geophysics providing access to a new Earth Science exhibit.

“LSU has so many unique collections that could be put to such wonderful use by innovative teachers,” said M. Jayne Fleener, dean of the College of Education. “The College of Education serves as a bridge to educators across the state by opening up our vast resources and interdisciplinary collaborations and sharing these natural treasures with the education community.”