

# EDTECH

## Leading The Way to Tomorrow's Classroom

By Mike Journee

Looking into the future seems an impossible, mystical dream for most. Yet students and faculty in Boise State's Department of Educational Technology do it every day.

There is a realm of virtual worlds and avatars where the concepts of social networking are taken as far as technology allows in the name of finding new and interesting ways for teachers and students to engage, usually outside of the three-dimensional construct of the traditional classroom. It's a world in flux that's being explored even as it's being created.

"It's very hard to predict 10 years out anymore," says Lisa Dawley, head of the Educational Technology Department (EdTech), which, as part of the College of Education, is the largest university based trainer of K-12 online teachers in the country.

"Our university as a whole will look and behave much differently

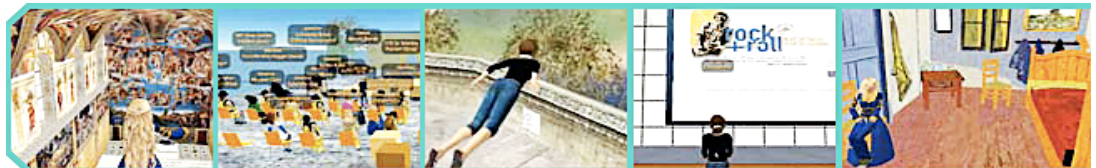
than it does today. We will offer many more modalities for learning options: campus-based, online, blended, mobile, augmented reality, and even holographic avatars who visit and move through real locations in real time."

Make no mistake, this isn't about frivolous online gaming or flashy audio-visual add-ons. EdTech faculty are helping set the national agenda for online teaching with research and innovative programs that have been recognized by the Chronicle of Higher Education and Education Week and featured in a series about K-12 online education by Edutopia, part of the George

Lucas Educational Foundation.

With students from all 50 states and more than 20 countries, as well as international partnerships with schools in Australia, Taiwan, South Korea and Wales, the virtual reach of EdTech is global. The graduate program has seen enrollments jump 225 percent in the last five years, making it the largest graduate program at Boise State.

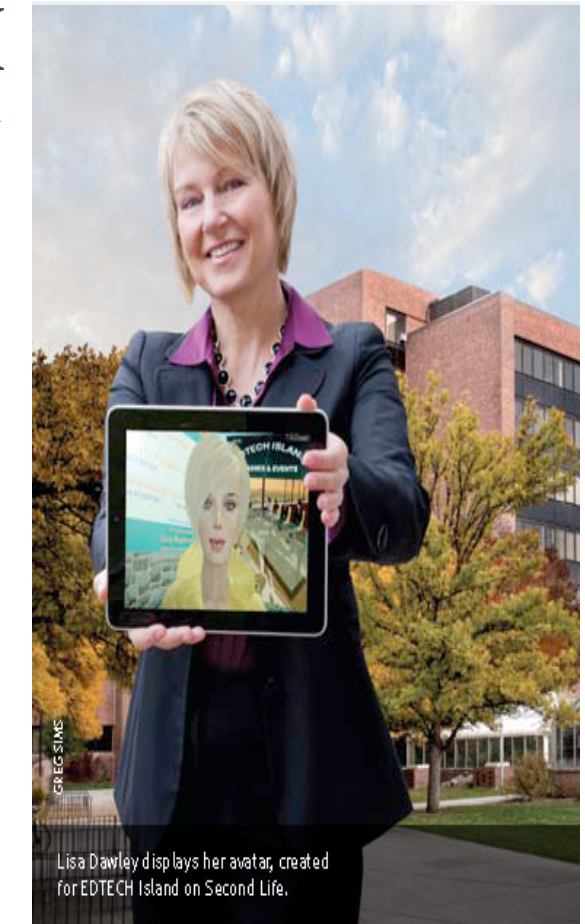
Faculty awards from groups like iNACOL, the international association for kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (K-12) online learning, and the Association for Educational Communication and Technology speak to the faculty's growing prestige, as does increasingly frequent publication in journals



such as the British Journal of Educational Technology, the most distinguished journal in the field.

In Idaho, EdTech worked closely with the Idaho State Department of Education to establish statewide standards for K-12 online teachers. The two-year project, only the second such effort in the country, was based on EdTech research in national trends and needs in this area.

In addition, EdTech has developed a deep relationship with the Idaho Digital Learning Academy, which works in partnership with Idaho school districts to offer online choices that would not otherwise



exist. Recent collaborations include an NSF grant to design virtual learning objects in geochronology (or earth-time virtual learning) as well as a joint research venture to establish a teacher education portal, including workshops available to all teachers in Idaho, and provide curriculum to train online teachers and course designers.

Ultimately, as the EdTech website <http://edtech.boisestate.edu> points out, it is about "engaging learners to understand the implications of technology in today's society, empowering them to think, supporting them to lead their own learning and career paths, as well as the learning of others."

These screen shots show avatars interacting in Second Life. Left to right, avatars explore the Sistine Chapel, study in a virtual classroom, fly from one location to another, access the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and inhabit Vincent Van Gogh's 1889 painting "La Chambre de Van Gogh à Arles."