

PHOTOS: NUS

**VIRTUAL CAMPUS:** NUS has 3,700 students attending lessons in Second Life. The university set up shop in Second Life as an experiment on using the virtual world as a platform for teaching as well as to identify social-interaction patterns among students in a virtual world.

» FROM PAGE 1

## Learning goes way of Facebook and Wikis

Over at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, a new iMedia Centre was set up in 2006 to help its lecturers incorporate technology into their lessons to make them connect more with the tech-savvy young.

The centre's 20 staff have juiced up the lecturers' basic PowerPoint software to include Flash clips and virtual laboratories.

At the Singapore Management University (SMU), some lecturers even use social networking websites as lesson tools.

Assistant Professor Michael Netzley, who teaches corporate communications at SMU's business school, does not use textbooks; instead, he uses the social networking site Facebook to push reading material out to students.

Instead of giving reading lists or printing stacks of reading material, he sends them links of websites they should visit with a click of the button on Facebook.

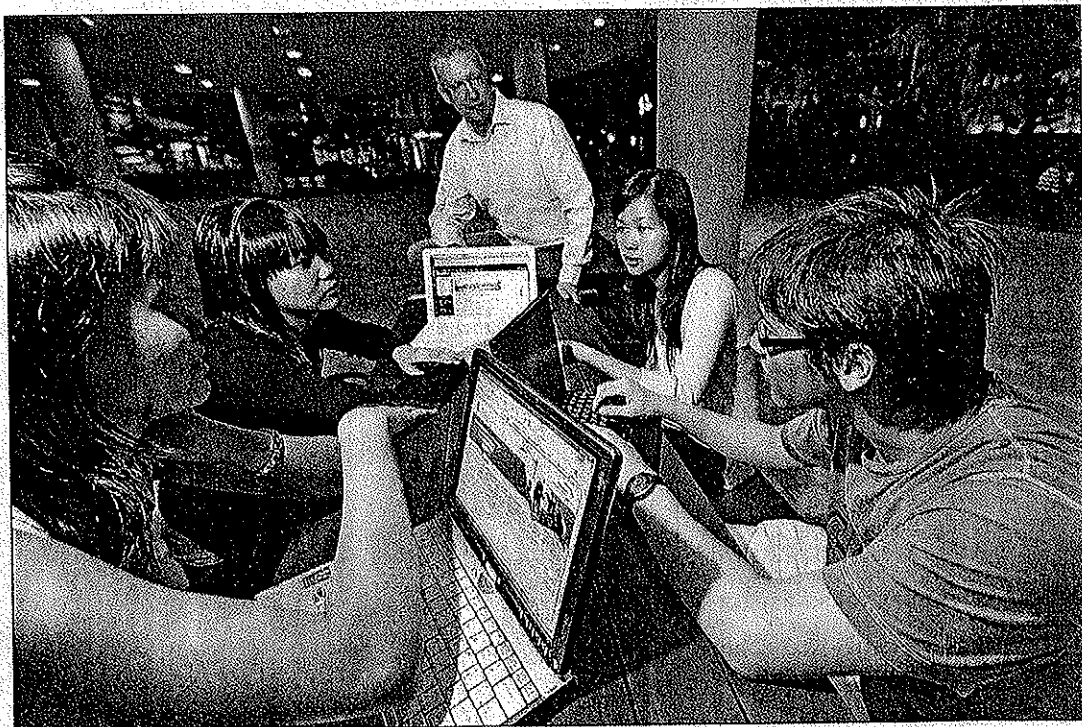
It is a friendlier way of getting them to read their notes, said the don, whose own Facebook page carries his CV, lists the courses he teaches and the books his students should read.

Students do their class assignments on their own blogs, which are then "fed" to their professor via Google Reader, a page which checks specified blogs for content updates.

Dr Netzley also uses Skype, software that allows free calls over the Internet when the students need to conduct overseas conference calls with industry experts during the lessons.

Besides changing the way he runs his classes, technology has also changed the way he grades class projects.

"Wikis", common work spaces online used to submit



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**CLASS DISCUSSION OUTSIDE CLASS:** Dr Netzley in discussion with students (from left) Rachel Chia, 21, Stephanie Siow, 22, Chen Yi Xiao, 22, and Seth Yap, 23, outside the SMU cafe. Instead of handing out reading lists, he uses the social networking site Facebook to push reading material out to students.

projects, come with a "history" function so Dr Netzley can track how each student's project has evolved.

"It's amazing, how technology makes visible what was previously hidden," he said.

For students who think they can use instant messaging functions to chat with friends during classes, Dr Netzley makes it a point to call upon them to answer questions.

Meanwhile, the National University of Singapore (NUS) has recently established a presence in the virtual community of Second Life, with 3,700 students registered and attending a range of lessons, including

computing and public relations.

Mrs Chew-Goh Swee Wah, the assistant director of the NUS Computer Centre, said NUS set up shop in Second Life as an experiment on using the virtual world as a platform for academic instruction as well as to identify social interaction patterns among students in a virtual world.

"It would be great if we could collaborate with other leading universities which are also tapping this common online resource in the virtual world," she said.

Mr Peter Isaacson, the vice-president for worldwide education at software company

Adobe, said that the need to keep up with technology and see what others are doing to equip their students for the future is "critical" if students are to be prepared for the global economy.

He added: "It's a mistake to see technology as a separate course. Students of today don't see it as separate from their lives.

"It has already been embedded into their everyday lives and educators need to realise that - and embrace it."

janeng@sph.com.sg