

GOVERNANCE OF VIRTUAL WORLDS
LAW 791/EDT 791
Spring 2010

Course Description

Virtual worlds, including massively multiplayer online games (MMOs), used by tens of millions of people worldwide, have given rise to new forms of social, economic and political organization, and present unique challenges in their interaction with current legal, political, economic and cultural institutions. This course will use cross-disciplinary methods to examine community self-governance within virtual worlds, as well as regulation of virtual worlds by businesses and governments worldwide.

The workload and intellectual demands for this course will be substantial. We will usually meet three hours a week in a seminar setting, but may substitute sessions within a virtual environment for some or all of any week's course time.

While no previous familiarity with virtual worlds or MMOs is required, students must be comfortable with software tools and online discussion.

A significant portion of this course will involve a hands-on experiment in virtual worlds governance. Publication co-authorship credit may be available. Active participation in the project, or an equivalent, will be essential to success in the course.

Graduate students in many fields (including English, political science, education, engineering and graphic arts), and exceptional undergraduates are welcome. Enrollment will be capped at 20 law students and 20 students from other fields.

Instructors:

- **Connie J. Mablesen, JD:** Ms. Mablesen is an intellectual property attorney in practice for over 26 years. Her practice emphasis is arts and entertainment and internet, technology, and virtual worlds. In 1994, she represented the first people to commercialize the internet and was the first attorney in the world to establish a virtual law office in Second Life. She is a member of the ABA section of Science and Technology and is secretary of the State Bar of Arizona E-commerce section. She maintains a virtual world blog at www.virtualworldbriefs.com and enjoys playing her balance druid in World of Warcraft.
- **John Carter McKnight, MIA, JD:** Mr. McKnight has been a Wall Street corporate finance attorney, an officer and director of nonprofit organizations involved in science education and policy, and was Prelaw Services Coordinator at ASU. Currently, he is pursuing a PhD in Human And Social Dimensions of Science and Technology at ASU, working on the use of games and virtual worlds to encourage democratic participation in science and technology policy. He is a political and business advisor to online communities and a tanking paladin in World of Warcraft.

Overview:

In this course, we will explore the landscape of virtual worlds and discover what forms of governance exist to regulate the behavior of individuals and groups within them. Governance can take various forms, from laws, regulations and contracts, to the more unexpected such as software design, customs and habits, and the unpredictable actions of crowds. The course pulls from existing legal structures, but includes a large body of interdisciplinary readings, materials, and discussion.

Three credit hours will be delivered through a mix of on-campus seminar sessions and meetings within a virtual world. The virtual settings will be used for a class project to enable you to experience first-hand virtual community formation and governance issues, as well as to bring in prominent guest speakers and representatives of virtual communities.

You do not need to be on campus for virtual sessions. As session scheduling may depend on the availability of guest speakers and on special events, the reading schedule may be subject to change, and will be posted at least one week in advance on the course website..

Required Materials:

- Benjamin Duranske, *Virtual Law: Navigating the Legal Landscape of Virtual Worlds*. Available at the ASU Bookstore, from online retailers and in a Kindle edition.
- Software:
 - *World of Warcraft*. Available at retailers including Game Stop and Best Buy, from online retailers and by digital download from <https://signup.worldofwarcraft.com/trial/freetrial.html>
 - *Second Life*. Available by digital download for free from <https://join.secondlife.com/>
- The bulk of course readings are online, and will be posted on the course website.

IMPORTANT: Software Information

- **World of Warcraft (WoW):**
 - You do **not** need to purchase the *Burning Crusade* or *Wrath of the Lich King* expansion packs, though of course you may, if you choose. These give access to additional character types and high-level content.
 - By the second course session you must have a **paid account**, **not** the 10-day free trial. Trial accounts do not allow for guild membership, receiving in-game mail or joining group communications channels, all of which are essential to class participation.
 - WoW runs on most computers newer than 5 years old.
- **Second Life (SL):**
 - SL is graphically challenging. If your computer has difficulties running SL, please see the “**Account Setup**” document on the course website for suggestions for improving performance.

- **Alternate Worlds:**
 - Students with ethical, moral, religious or hardware issues preventing them from participating in WoW or SL may contact the instructors to make alternate arrangements. Participation in one MMO and one social virtual world is still **required**.
- **Account Setup:** By the second class session (week of January 25), you must have active WoW and SL accounts, and have created your character/avatar in each world. The instructors will be available for help after the first class session, and at various other times, to be discussed in the first class.
- Please see the "**Account Setup**" document on the class website for detailed instructions, should you have any difficulties. Please note the following crucial details:
 - **WoW:**
 - You must choose the Misha-US realm. This is critical: to participate in course sessions, you must have a character on the Misha realm.
 - New players: create a HORDE character of an Orc or Troll **only**. Feel free to choose any available gender, look or class, and name.
 - Veteran players may create any level 1 Horde character, but must bring them to the Valley of Trials in Durotar for early course sessions.
 - All students may create additional characters, or transfer characters onto Misha, but everyone in the class must have a low-level character in the Valley of Trials by the second course session.
 - **SL:**
 - One of SL's strengths is that avatar creation is limited only by your imagination. We encourage your creativity, but please bear in mind the **Note on Professionalism** below.
 - Anyone with an existing SL avatar is welcome to use it for the course. You are also welcome to create a new avatar in order to experience orientation along with the rest of the class or to have an avatar with no other affiliations.

Note On Professionalism

You are strongly encouraged to explore WoW, SL and other virtual worlds on your own time. You may choose either to do so as an identified ASU student or as an independent participant observer. Feel free to create an "alt," an alternate avatar not affiliated with the course guild and group and not identified as a researcher, for exploration and play. Just remember, when you are using your "main," or any avatar identified as a member of the course, you will be representing ASU. Please behave accordingly.

You may encounter people, speech or actions that you find disagreeable or disturbing, just as you would in exploring any city or community. Please exercise tolerance and discretion while on your ASU-identified avatar (and we encourage you to do so at all times). Sexist, racist, other discriminatory, hostile, or hate speech in-world will not be tolerated. Bear in mind that public, group and "private" chat may be recorded and saved by anyone with access.

Violations of the terms of service of WoW, SL or any other world you explore in conjunction with coursework will be considered grounds for dismissal from the course.

Finally, be aware that virtual worlds are immersive. Keep track of the amount of time you are spending in-world on non-class activities. Do not neglect your other course work, job or professional or personal responsibilities.

Grading

- Class Participation (classroom and online): 25 points
- World of Warcraft Guild Project (or equivalent): 25 points
- Term Paper/Project: 40 points
 - Final Presentation: 10 points
 - Paper/Project: 30 points
- Weekly Questions: 10 points (plus up to 10 points bonus credit)

Class Participation

This course is not designed to teach you a fixed body of knowledge, but to give you the tools to explore and perform cutting-edge research in an important new field. You will demonstrate success by actively engaging with the concepts and spaces we present to you. Participation in both classroom and online sessions will thus form a major portion of your grade.

One of the strengths of virtual worlds is that they often encourage participation by people who may be less comfortable speaking out in a physical group, as the technology of chat works to discourage conversational dominance, thus leveling the participatory playing field. By offering multiple avenues for participation, we hope to enable everyone to contribute in a meaningful way to the group.

World of Warcraft Guild Project

The centerpiece of this course is an experiment in virtual worlds self-governance: you will be asked to create and maintain a guild in World of Warcraft through the semester. What you name it, who may be admitted, and any and all rules regulating speech, economics, dispute resolution, decisionmaking authority and other aspects of community life will be up to you to create.

The instructors intend to publish a paper on the experiment; active contributors will be listed as co-authors.

Participation can be demonstrated through blogging on the course website, through memoranda to the instructors, or by more creative means, upon instructor approval. We are more interested in quality of observations than quantity of participation, and will work to ensure students moderate their time involvements.

For students unable or unwilling to play World of Warcraft, active participation in another virtual community may be substituted, upon instructor consultation and permission.

Term Paper/Project

Every student will be required to perform a major research project, and to present it in a professional format. As this is an interdisciplinary course, we will work with students individually on topics, format, citation style and other expectations. We encourage students to think beyond standard term papers to make creative use of virtual spaces and new media in an academically rigorous way.

As public presentation is an important component of academic and professional work, you will present your research to the class, to receive feedback from the instructors and your classmates on presentation style and content. We ask that you treat your presentation as if it were for an academic or professional conference, including appropriate dress and demeanor.

Weekly Questions

For weeks 2-11, by 11:59 PM on Tuesday night you will submit, by posting to the course website, one question for class discussion, with a short explanation for each question as to why you think it is important, what issues it raises, and how it relates to the week's reading.

The instructors may choose the best questions for class discussion. Students submitting a question chosen by the instructors will receive one bonus point per question, up to a maximum of 10 for the semester (in other words, consistently good, thoughtful questions can raise your final grade by a full letter!)

GOVERNANCE OF VIRTUAL WORLDS
LAW 791/EDT 791
Spring 2010

Session 1: Introduction to Virtual Worlds: History, Relevance & Opportunity (Mableson and McKnight) (Jan 20)

Session 2: Essentials of Governance; Implications for Virtual Worlds (Mableson and McKnight) (Jan 27)

Session 3: Currencies, RMT, Market Economies & Microtransactions (McKnight) (Feb 3)

Session 4: Ownership of Personal and Real Property-Virtual Style (Mableson) (Feb 10)

Session 5: Identity, Privacy, & Defamation (McKnight) (Feb 17)

Session 6: Branding, Marketing and Trademarks (Governance by Governmental Institutions-Federal Laws)-Trademark (Mableson) (Feb 24)

Session 7: Governance by Contract and Corporate Management (McKnight) (Mar 3)

Session 8: Creative Rights and Powers (Governance by Governmental Institutions-Federal Laws) – Copyright (Mableson) (March 10)

SPRING BREAK

Session 9: Governance By Users (McKnight) (March 24)

Session 10: Governance by Governmental Institutions-Federal Laws- Gambling, Taxes, Commerce, COPPA (Mableson) (March 31)

Session 11: Conflicts in Governance-Jurisdiction & Dispute Resolution (Mableson) (April 7)

Session 12: Hot Topics or Student Presentations (Mableson and McKnight) (April 14)

Session 13: Student Presentations (April 21)

Session 14: Student Presentations (April 28)

Session 15: Student Presentations (April 5)