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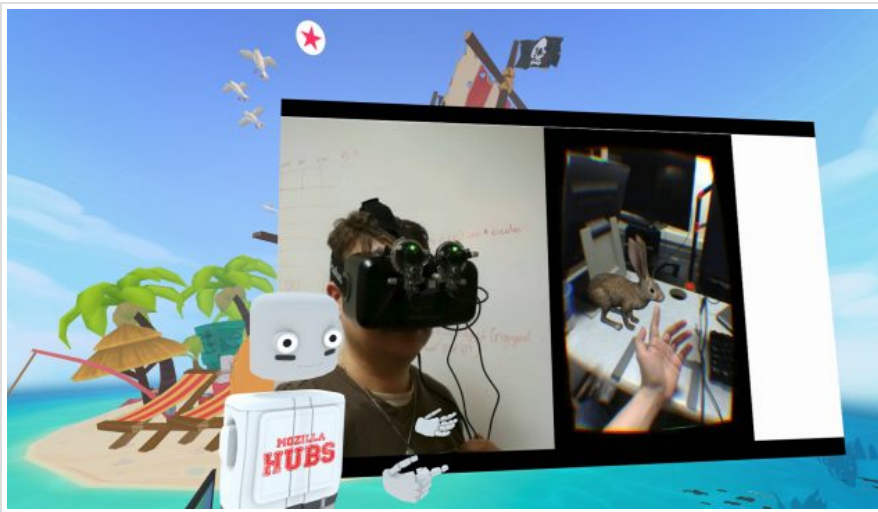
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Virtual Reality Courses Offer Immersion into Remote Instruction

Interactive VR instructor and classroom both educational and entertaining for students

MAY 5, 2020 BY EDWIN B. SMITH

FaTvLiErCSciPrSt



This screen capture illustrates how real-life action compares with the VR version for Jones' lectures. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – With all **University of Mississippi** classes being delivered online during the COVID-19 outbreak, professors have had to get creative. While many are streaming live or playing pre-recorded videos, one professor is using a virtual reality version of himself and getting surprising results in return.

Adam Jones has been using VR to deliver lectures for two courses, CSCI 343: Fundamentals of Data Science and CSCI 447: Immersive Media, a VR development class. Besides the VR lectures, he has been conducting live-streamed tutorials and Q&A sessions on YouTube.

"I've been really pleased with the results," said Jones, assistant professor of **computer and information science** in the **School of Engineering**.

"There are, of course, wrinkles to be ironed out when making a big change like this, but it has been surprisingly easier than expected. Students have the option to view lectures through VR headsets, on computer screens like a first-person 3D game, or through online video."

Jones said the process for translating a lecture into VR is pretty smooth.

"It is very similar to teaching in a real classroom," he said. "Instructors do not just give slideshows. They point, gesture, move and make eye contact with students while they teach. These are things that you sometimes lose when delivering online lectures by video, but you get to keep these visual cues in VR.

"It also has the added bonus that you can lecture in your pajamas."

Students taking these VR courses have enjoyed interacting with Jones and one other.

"The use of a VR environment, which incorporated a traditional PowerPoint and a floating head with hands, was a genius method to continue classes without interruption," said Logan Parker, a sophomore computer science major from Laurel. "The VR environment proved to be engaging as well as entertaining to me."

VR instruction doesn't feel much different than being in a standard classroom, said James Tweedle, a senior in biomedical engineering from Cleveland.

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Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's



Adam Jones, UM assistant professor of computer and information science, is using virtual reality to teach his students remotely. Submitted photo

"It simply felt like I was watching Dr. Jones present at the front of the classroom," Tweedle said. "Whereas in a classroom setting, I might miss something a teacher states without realizing it or being able to write it down, (but) having VR lectures I can return to if need be has made learning the material easier."

Jones said even his 2-year-old daughter enjoys watching the lectures.

"She absolutely loves robots and gets very excited to see 'robot daddy' on the computer," he said. "I think it's just a really fun format."

Students in the VR development course use the collaboration function to share the virtual worlds that they build for their assignments. The creativity that they have shown in building these worlds has been "phenomenal," Jones said.

"It is super exciting grading their virtual worlds because I never know what to expect. For their last assignment, they were instructed to build a retro-sci fi-themed world. Many of the students incorporated elements about the pandemic into the narratives for their virtual worlds."

With the spring semester winding down, Jones will be teaching a summer workshop for middle and high school students with UM Outreach and Continuing Education using this VR technology. Jones said he plans to continue using VR for teaching post-pandemic.

"This format is highly scalable since you aren't limited by seats in a physical classroom, but you still have that in-person feel," he said. "The virtual environment that we're using is made to enable collaboration."

To see a video of one of Jones' VR lectures, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHhf2y8dH88>.

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