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## SI 410 Ethics and Information Technology

### Assignment: Avatars and Personal Identity

[25% of total grade]

During the course module on avatars and identity, you will complete a two-step assignment: 1) construct two digital avatars, and 2) write about the experience. One of the avatars is intended to be a self-portrait of your virtual self. The fantasy avatar has an alternative (alter-ego?) identity that you specify. The written product is a reflection on the choices that you made when constructing identity in an online environment. Initial grading for the reflection will be done by your fellow students in the class MediaWiki site. Final grades will be assigned by the instructor.

#### ***Step 1: Build Two Avatars***

##### **A. Purchase two avatar characters at \$20.00 each.**

- Cash or checks for \$40.00 made out to “University of Michigan” will be accepted at the start of class or lab/discussion beginning on Thursday, October 21 and continuing through Thursday, October 28.
- With payment, you will receive a receipt and instructions on beginning work on your avatar characters.

##### **B. Go to the avatar building site: <http://www.evolver.com/>**

##### **C. Register for a free account (follow the “Sign In” link in the upper right corner of screen)**

- Create a new account and keep track of your login details.
- Alternatively, *Facebook Connect* & *OpenID* supported.

##### **D. Create one (1) Self-Portrait Avatar, using the following rules:**

- Naming: FirstnameLastinitial. For examples: PaulC or BrettC or HelenI.
  - Record the name for later use.
  - Click “Get Started.”
  - Choose “Blank Avatar: female or male” depending on your gender.
- Functions: Build your avatar self-portrait using the following five functions: face, skin, eyes, hair, body.
  - Your use of “clothing” may be fanciful.
  - Your use of “tattoo” is optional.
  - Experiment with choosing or not choosing your “parental” types. You can build your face from scratch or by melding the features of two characters. You then

have many choices to make about the other functions. Experiment and play around.

- Look in the mirror.
  - The goal in building the self-portrait should be to make the avatar match your appearance as closely as possible.
- Save your work using the naming convention listed above. Save frequently, as there is no auto-save function. Do NOT export the character.
- Keep notes on the choices you make and the settings of your avatar. These notes and images will be valuable source materials for your reflection.
- Make and save a picture of your Avatar. From the Dashboard, click “Transport,” then “Free,” then scroll to “Create High Resolution image, Gif...”
  - Choose your avatar name, then choose these settings:
    - Display: headshot (or other view)
    - Size: small
    - Rotation: 0 degrees (or other view)
    - Background: choose white in upper left corner
  - Click “Create”
  - Save to local hard drive for future use.

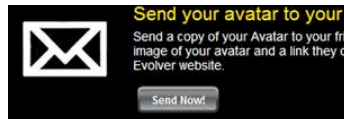
#### **E. Create one (1) Fantasy Character, using the following rules:**

- Naming: Provide a descriptive name of 12 characters or fewer. Example: SuperGeek.
  - Use no names that would embarrass you if you shared with your mother.
  - Record the name for later use
- Functions: Build your fantasy avatar using all seven functions: face, skin, eyes, hair, body, clothing, and tattoo.
  - Experiment with choosing or not choosing your “parental” types. You can build your fantasy face from scratch or by melding the features of two characters. You then have many choices to make about the other functions.
  - Do not look in the mirror (too much).
  - The goal in building the fantasy avatar should be to construct an identity that suits you if you were to transport yourself into a virtual environment of your choosing.
- Save your work using the name convention listed above. Save frequently, as there is no auto-save function. Do NOT export the characters.
- Keep detailed notes on the choices you are making and why. These notes and images will be valuable source materials for your reflection.
- Make and save a picture of your Avatar. From the Dashboard, click “Transport,” then “Free,” then scroll to “Create High Resolution image, Gif...”
  - Choose your avatar name, then choose these settings:
    - Display: headshot (or other view)
    - Size: small
    - Rotation: 0 degrees (or other view)
    - Background: choose white in upper left corner

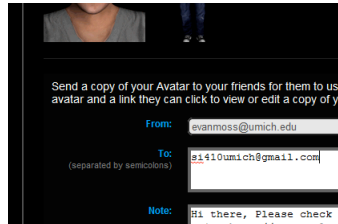
- Click “Create”
- Save to local hard drive for future use.

#### F. When you’re finished editing an avatar:

- Navigate to “**My Dashboard**” (i.e. account page), and select the “**Avatars**” tab:
  - Under your finished avatar, press the “**Transport**” button.
  - Select the “**Free**” tab.
  - Scroll down to “**Send your avatar to your friends**” (press “**Send Now!**” button).



- In the **To:** box, input [sj410umich@gmail.com](mailto:sj410umich@gmail.com)



- Click “**Send**” (none of the other options matter).



#### Deadline

- Start: As soon as you have paid for the avatars. As early as Thursday, Oct. 21, 5:30 pm.
- Finish: As soon as you can, but no later than Friday, November 5, 5:00 pm.
- Notify: Send email notifying us that you have completed building your avatars. In the email, list the names you have assigned to your self-portrait avatar and your fantasy avatar.

#### Step 2: Reflect on Avatars and Your Own Identities

The purpose of the reflection is to describe the choices you made in constructing both your Self-Portrait Avatar and your Fantasy Avatar. Your reflection can largely take the form of a personal essay, but you must include at least one external source beyond any of the readings on the syllabus. The reason for including information beyond the course readings is to anchor your reflection in something other than your pure personal opinion. The traditional fiction and non-fiction literature is rich with musings on the challenges of self-portraiture, so it will be useful to locate, read and reflect on one of these issues. Insight from writings, movies, music, multimedia, and other sources on the avatar in virtual environments is also relevant. You may get as creative as you wish in thinking through and documenting how you construct your virtual

identity and counter-identity. Any source(s) that you use (magazine articles, movies, books, etc.) as influences on your reflection should be cited in a list of references included at the end of the reflection.

The reflection will take the form of a written essay with two illustrations, submitted to the SI 410 MediaWiki site as you wish to have it read. The reflection should not exceed 1,500 words in length (the equivalent of 6 double spaced pages of text) and could be shorter if you can cover your issues in fewer words. The writing may conform to any writing style that you choose. Upload the two images of your avatar (one each per avatar) to the MediaWiki site and then embed the images in your essay. Illustrate the physical features of each of your avatars. Include one view (head from any angle or full body view) per avatar.

Submit your essay to the SI 410 wiki site as a finished product. To submit your essay, click on the “Avatars” button on the home page of the class wiki, edit the page, create a new page for with your name, and then place your essay on the page with your name. Remember: to create a new page in edit mode, place the name of the page inside a pair of double brackets. Example [[Mavis Staples]]

Assessment of your essay models the anonymous peer-review system used most of the articles you have read in the class: students are the reviewers, the instructor is the editor who makes the final approval. On a first come basis, each student will choose one essay (other than your own) and comment on the quality of the work. **COMMENT WHILE LOGGED IN UNDER YOUR ALIAS.** The commentary must be placed under the “Discussion” tab and entered in edit mode. The commentary should focus on two issues: 1) how did the author use an outside source of information; and 2) how well did the author describe the issues that he or she faced in creating the two avatars. A good commentary will be at least 100 words in length.

Grades are assigned by the instructor and submitted individually and privately through CTools.

The total assignment is worth 25% of your final grade, or 25 of 100 points. Up to ten (10) points are assigned based on the extent to which your reflection describes the characteristics of the two avatars created in the lab assignments and the depth of thought about the issues of identity in virtual environments. Up to ten (10) points are assigned based on the creativity and effort expended in creating the avatar characters. Up to five (5) points are assigned based on the quality of the commentary on one other student’s reflection.

### **Deadlines:**

Your reflection must be posted in the class MediaWiki site, by Thursday, November 11 at 4:00 pm. Late reflections will be penalized 10% of the assignment grade.

Your commentary on one student’s reflection must be entered into the appropriate “Discussion” tab by Tuesday, November 16 at 4:00 pm.