Virtual Reality in the Academic Library: An Innovative Approach

By Ernesto Hernandez Jr.

Most of today’s students could be considered digital natives, often well-versed in using computers, smartphones, gaming consoles, and general technological tools. A feature that has been around for some time now is gaining more traction as accessibility and technology become more easily accessible: 3D and virtual reality. Although this technology is nothing new, the pedagogy, innovation, and creativity involving this technology is making an ever-more increasing presence in academia. Virtual environments, by their nature, are engaging and may provide an alternative means of delivery for information literacy and information exploration. Many colleges and universities are exploring multiple ways to facilitate these technologies into their curriculum, but what about the library? The library is a gateway to information, both physically and electronically. As many digital natives access information online, more specifically through online library resources, the question then becomes, how can the library provide a more immersive and interactive environment for our users?

An approach the Nevada State College, Marydean Martin Library is taking is exploring innovative approaches utilizing virtual environments. Ernesto Hernandez, the Emerging Technologies Librarian at NSC, has been actively exploring how library users could benefit from using a 3D or virtual library experience. Although published literature is scarce for research related specifically to academic libraries and 3D/virtual environments, Ernesto has become engaged with this technology as it has become more easily accessible. Inspired from the Google I/O conference of 2014, Ernesto has held a maker space in the Marydean Martin Library for users to build their own 3D/virtual reality viewers from cardboard and experience this immersive technology form their own smartphones. With virtual reality transitioning from a niche market to mainstream acceptance, the Marydean Martin Library would like to provide this experience to enhance and supplement information literacy.