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Kennesaw State students release virtual world production

Proof-of-concept, virtual world film underwritten by
Online News Association Challenge Fund

Kennesaw, Ga. (22 October 2015) – An experiment in journalism storytelling debuts today with the public release of the virtual world machinima “The Kid, The Cop, The Punch.” The story is narrated by Xavier McElrath-Bey, a youth justice advocate, telling of a childhood encounter with a violent police officer. Watch [The Kid, The Cop, The Punch](#).

Leonard Witt, executive director of the Center for Sustainable Journalism at Kennesaw State University, says, “This student production is our first proof of concept in telling true stories using virtual worlds as our medium.”

Witt adds, “3D virtual reality storytelling is projected to be a multi-billion dollar industry in the near future. This experimental project is Kennesaw State University students’ portal into that future.”

“The Kid, The Cop, The Punch” was produced over the summer by computer science students Derek Maier and David Eric Nelson. The machinima, a digital inworld film, was edited by Cristina Guerra, a new media arts student.

Gwenette Writer Sinclair, virtual world developer and project consult, says, “Training our interns in virtual world skills, machinima production and teamwork collaboration tools has been one of my most rewarding projects. As we work together to meet the goals of our grant, combining real journalism and the virtual

world medium, I am continually impressed by the team's dedication, software learning skills, research abilities and creative solutions. "The Kid, The Cop, The Punch" is one of the best first effort machinimas I have seen."

Nelson, who has worked on virtual world set building, interactive object coding and is the master script writer for our next video, remarks, "Working on this project has been a unique experience as it has allowed us insight into the challenges and rewards of many different areas of expertise including journalism, virtual environments, and film production."

Speaking of her internship experiences in sound editing, set design and production pipeline management, Guerra says, "Merging journalism and virtual reality has allowed us to analyze and explore a new medium that is filled with possibilities. Virtual reality is much more than it seems. It allows the user to truly experience and be immersed in a world that offers many different perspectives. This, combined with real journalism, makes for engaging and informative machinima."

Maier said, "Researching these stories help us realize the troubles that youth today face. By recreating their stories in the virtual world we gain more insight into the juvenile justice system and experience a deeper sense of the difficulties they faced. Through the medium of machinima we can share that perspective with others."

Maier, Nelson and Guerra have been joined this fall semester by eight other KSU student interns comprising a full production company specializing in journalism, machinima making and social media.

Along with "The Kid, The Cop, The Punch," two other mini-documentary, virtual world machinima are currently in production. One is based on an autobiographical poem written by a 17-year-old incarcerated girl; the other, an investigative journalism piece, focuses on a 14-year-old boy, who was sentenced to 40 years in prison when convicted as an unarmed tagalong in a non-lethal shooting.

Learn more about the JJIE Virtual World Project as an ONA Challenge Fund winner and its project goals [on our website](#).

The Center for Sustainable Journalism at Kennesaw State University, just outside of Atlanta, is one of the 2015-2016 winners of the Online News Association Challenge Fund for Innovation in Journalism Education. This journalism project, "Marginalized Youth Voices Amplified in Virtual Worlds", is underwritten by that winning grant. The Challenge Fund is administered by the

Online News Association with support from the Excellence and Ethics in Journalism Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, Knight Foundation, the Democracy Fund, and the Rita Allen Foundation.

About The Center for Sustainable Journalism:

The Center for Sustainable Journalism and its online publication The Juvenile Justice Information Exchange (JJIE.org), are located at Kennesaw State University near Atlanta, Ga. *The JJIE.org is the only national publication covering juvenile justice issues on a consistent, daily basis. By focusing on delivering information and an “exchange” of ideas, the JJIE.org fosters a community of support around the issues facing youth across the USA.*

The Online News Association *is a leader in the rapidly changing world of journalism; a catalyst for innovation in storytelling across all platforms; a resource for journalists seeking guidance and growth; and a champion of best practices through training, awards, community outreach.*

Kennesaw State University *is the third-largest university in Georgia, offering more than 100 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees. A member of the University System of Georgia, Kennesaw State is a comprehensive university with more than 32,000 students from 130 countries. In [January 2015](#), Kennesaw State and Southern Polytechnic State University consolidated to create one of the 50 largest public universities in the country.*