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June 22, 2011

Bonnie Juergens
President and CEO
Amigos Library Services
14400 Midway Road
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Dear Ms. Juergens,

Enclosed is the final report on the project entitled *Building an Information Commons in Second Life* supported by a grant from the 2009 Amigos Fellowship Program of Amigos Library Services, Inc. The Fellowship was awarded to Ms. Tracey Thompson, then Acquisitions Librarian at New Mexico State University Library.

NMSU purchased land in Second Life in 2007 to permit experimentation by faculty, students, and staff in utilizing Second Life for teaching, learning, and outreach activities. The Information Commons in Second Life was built by Ms. Thompson to enrich the experiences of students, faculty, and staff in the Second Life virtual world. Support for the Information Commons and Aggie Island has been critical in providing the platform for experimentation and demonstration of the value of teaching and learning in a virtual world. Individuals who create avatars in Second Life can visit Aggie Island and walk through the Information Commons. Students, using their avatars, gather for lectures by their faculty avatars in the Information Commons.

The creation of the Information Commons was the work of Tracey Thompson with assistance from Jenna Kammer, College Instructor of Library Services at the NMSU Alamogordo campus. Tracey Thompson moved with her family to Oklahoma in 2010 and Jenna Kammer took a new position in Missouri. I agreed to replace Tracey Thompson as Principal Investigator for the project in May 2010. As Principal Investigator, I have been working with faculty who utilize Second Life in their teaching. One professor, Dr. Mike DeMers recently won a university-wide teaching award for his innovative work with Second Life. It has been my pleasure to work with the dedicated faculty and staff who are utilizing the unique

features of Second Life in their teaching. The Amigos Fellowship has been instrumental in advancing the efforts to maximize the use of Second Life as a teaching tool.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

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Building an Information Commons in Second Life – Final Report

All of the instructional activities taking place on Aggie Island in the virtual world of Second Life are made possible by the support provided by grants like the Amigos Fellowship Program of the Amigos Library Services, Inc. The very existence of the Information Commons on Aggie Island is due to the support of this program.

On May 29, 2009, Tracey Thompson, then Acquisitions Librarian at New Mexico State University Library, was notified that the Amigos Board of Trustees had awarded her one of the three Year 2009 Amigos Fellowships in the amount of \$3,500 for the project, *Building an Information Commons in Second Life*. This project has the support of the NMSU Library Administration and teaching faculty in several NMSU departments on the main campus as well as instructors at the Alamogordo campus of NMSU. Individuals in these departments, including Dr. Bethany Bovard, Manager of the NMSU Second Life Project in the College of Extended Learning, have been involved in explorations of the educational possibilities of virtual worlds such as Second Life. To that end, NMSU purchased a space in Second Life in 2007 (Aggie Island) that would allow for experimentation with ways to support students, faculty, and staff in utilizing Second Life for teaching, learning, and outreach activities. The project involving the building of an Information Commons in Second Life was intended to enrich the experiences of students, faculty, and staff and also of the larger Second Life community.

Examples of the kinds of activities at Aggie Island in the NMSU Second Life space include Associate Professor of Geology, Dr. Michael N. Demers' utilization of Second Life as a teaching tool for Geography 481 (Fundamentals of Geographic Information Systems) class. He has created hands-on laboratory exercises for map projections where students perform the projections on 2 and 3 dimensional objects in Second Life. He also developed exercises in map encoding, map tiling, 3-D modeling of raster GIS topographic surfaces, and many more. He meets his class in-world for discussions and presentations. This Spring, Professor DeMers won a University teaching award for his excellence in teaching using Second Life. Prior to the development of the Information Commons in Second Life, Jenna Kammer, College Instructor of Library Services at the NMSU Alamogordo campus, was using Aggie Island for class sessions, training and student study groups. She has used Aggie Island as a training platform but without the resources needed from an Information Commons. The development of the Information Commons in Second Life has provided those resources for students.

The Aggie Island Information Commons is a reality in the virtual world of Second Life and is visited by untold numbers of Second Life avatars. The creation of the Information Commons was the work of Tracey Thompson with assistance from Jenna Kammer. Tracey Thompson then moved with her family

to Oklahoma and Jenna Kammer took a new position out of state. I agreed to replace Tracey Thompson as Principal Investigator for the project in May 2010.

The purpose of the *Building an Information Commons in Second Life* project is to explore the growing potential of virtual worlds such as Second Life in libraries and to build cooperation among the five New Mexico State University campuses and libraries. Objectives include: build the Information Commons on Aggie Island in Second Life; provide support for instructors using Second Life as a teaching platform and to increase the collaboration of the five campus libraries in Second Life.

In consultation with Professor DeMers and other NMSU Second Life faculty, we determined that the most effective use of the Amigos Fellowship funds was to support the exploration of the educational possibilities of virtual worlds utilizing Second Life and to support the development of Aggie Island and experimentation with ways to utilize Second Life for teaching, learning, and outreach activities. The project involving the building of an Information Commons in Second Life was intended to enrich the experiences of students, faculty, and staff and also of the larger Second Life community.

The first challenge for faculty at NMSU campuses in using Second Life as a teaching tool is to find a way to pay for the continuation of Aggie Island in Second Life. Without Aggie Island and the Information Commons on the Island, there is no platform for faculty to use in experimentation. The priority for funding has been to pay rent to Second Life to keep Aggie Island. If rent on the island is not paid, all of the creative work which has gone into developing the island, including the Information Commons, would be lost. In addition to paying to sustain the Island as a platform, funds are being used in-world to support the faculty who are using Second Life as a tool for teaching and to continue to maintain Aggie Island. Expansion of the Island is contemplated as well as the development of innovative virtual teaching spaces. Sadly, several other universities' projects started in Second Life have been lost because of their inability to maintain Second Life space. NMSU's work in Second Life is becoming even more important as other universities' faculty leave Second Life. Without this grant and other support, the platform for Professor DeMers' work in Geology, for example, would not be available. As for multi-campus experimentation, there are faculty members at the other campuses utilizing Second Life, most notably Anthropology faculty at the NMSU Alamogordo campus..

Building an Information Commons in Second Life project has been instrumental in building the Information Commons on Aggie Island in Second Life and providing support for teaching faculty using Second Life as a teaching platform. Because of the departure of the two librarians at the main campus and the Alamogordo campus involved in Second Life, the objective to increase the collaboration of the five campus libraries has not been thoroughly addressed, although the collaboration and communication between teaching faculty members at the NMSU campuses has been strengthened through regular meetings in-world at the Information Commons on Aggie Island.

It has been my pleasure to work with the dedicated faculty and staff who are utilizing the unique features of Second Life in their teaching. My assessment is that the Fellowship has been used to effectively advance the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the faculty who are utilizing Second Life in their

teaching. Aggie Island and the Information Commons continue to thrive in-world because of the Amigos Fellowship.

Principal Investigator:

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