Dr. Brian M. Slator
Computer Science Department
North Dakota State University
Fargo, ND 58105

Dear Dr. Slator:

The faculty and staff at the The University of Texas, Pan American (UTPA) Computing and Information Technology Center, Department of Computer Science, and the UTPA Center for Distance Learning are keenly interested in collaborating with you and your colleagues at North Dakota State University in your efforts to establish a Science Learning Center for Immersive Virtual Environments in Education.

The UTPA Center for Distance Learning employs a staff of 10 supporting faculty course development efforts, computing infrastructure, course dissemination, etc. In addition, resources at our disposal for this and other projects include the UTPA Computing and Information Technology Center (Congressional award funded) staff and the UTPA Computer Science department which has 12 faculty. The department serves approximately 350 undergraduate students and 60 Masters degree students which provides a readily available labor pool and a research capability.

After our many collaborative discussions we are particularly intrigued by the potential of immersive virtual environments for education and their capacity to engage students in their subject matter. The investigations involving scenario-based assessment and simulated worlds promoting culturally motivated knowledge acquisition are particularly interesting to us.

UTPA is a Hispanic Serving Institution of over 15,000 students, 86% of whom are Hispanic. As such, we believe we provide an ideal social and cultural "laboratory" to test your theories of role-based learning. As such we look forward to implementing the three-part plan you have proposed: 1) the opportunity to field studies of your immersive virtual environment software in the UTPA setting, including the Virtual Cell, the Geology Explorer, the Virtual Archaeologist, the ProgrammingLand MOOseum, and others as they are developed and ready to be tested; 2) a faculty/student summer/semester exchange program to promote cross-training of students and collaboration among faculty; leading to 3) developing virtual world projects built and/or hosted here at UTPA.

We view your Science Learning Center as an extraordinary opportunity on a number of levels and we look forward to collaborating on these projects.

Sincerely,


Richard H. Fowler, Ph. D.
Professor
Director, Computer and Information Technology Center