Animation Advisory Board

October 22nd 2023

David Dawson started the meeting by asking for introductions, he kicked it off, David Dawson Instructor of animation and mentioned he contracted for Deck 9 for the past year on the Expanse. Daniel Cheng went next and mentioned the studios he has worked for in the past and the positions he held, he was a concept artist for most of his career at EA, Pandemic studios, Treyarch, which is part of Activision, on a lot of Call of Duty games. Daniel also helped kick off Deviation Games and Big-Time Entertainment as an Art Director. Currently he is teaching classes at Rio Hondo and Otis. Mike Altamirano went next, he is a 3D Principal Artist, at Respawn Entertainment EA, he just finished working on Apex legends. Kristen Altamirano went next, she is a Principal Environment Artist at Wildlight Entertainment, she also had worked at Respawn on Apex Legends. Tri Do went next, he is a principal artist at Meta. James Crowson went next, he is a cinematic animator at Blizzard, he started at Pandemic and Interplay studios. Chris Donaldson went next, he is a Principal Artist at Blizzard Entertainment. Hikari Oishi went next and she is a Tech Artist at Obsidian Entertainment. Then Maria Andrade-Hernandez introduced herself she is, Interim Grant Manager Strong Workforce/Perkins, Career Technical Education. Jason Shum came late but he is the owner and founder of Superseed Studios. Andy Krelle introduced himself last and he was an Art manager an Niantic studios.

David Dawson said Thanks to everyone for participating on the board and mentioned that the Game Art and Design classes had gone past the second reading. That the courses will be offered Fall 2024, the first class will be GAD 101 on campus. Asked if anyone new a person who could teach it. David Dawson said he would look at offering these GAD classes online but not at first.

The first question David asked the committee was, since the new GAD classes would be covering game development, should the animation classes focus more on cinematics. James Crowson said, there is something to be said for an Animator to know how to put there work in Unreal. He then went on and said that Cinematics is one half of the industry. The other half was in game animation, he suggested splitting up assignments equally between cinematics and in game. David Dawson explained an assignment he had where he had asked students to import animations into Unreal and he was surprised how many didn't like it. James commented on the same thing happening at Blizzard where remote workers weren't as vigilant as artists in the studio space were. James referred to it as, COVID polish, because he believed remote working takes discipline to stay on task and be productive and some people cant do it as well as they should. David Dawson mentioned that students on line were not as productive as his on campus students. James suggested artists need to be under the radar and then James asked if the in game animation stuff would be lumped with the GAD classes and David said yes that's the idea. James said that splitting the in Game animation stuff off into the GAD classes and focusing on cinematics in the animation classes sounded good.

David then referred the question to other members, Mike Altamirano described one of his duties on the game he is working on recently, he said that he was asked integrate wind into the environment assets. Mike described rigging plants in the game's environment. Then Mike said that the foliage was used in a

Cinematic presentation and that characters weren't always what needed the focus for rigging and animation but environment art as well. So he also said the cinematics stuff was just important to games as cinematics for film and TV. Kristen agreed and said she was working on a proto type where artist were storyboarding and working on camera shots for the environment and showing animated environment assets, and that it was engaging. Kristen then suggested student's portfolios have animated assets in there environmental pieces. She then said there should be cinematic stuff in the GAD classes. Tri Do said he agreed that the cinematic approach to displaying student's 3D art work was important and good camera work was important as well. David acknowledged that cinematics should be a part of both programs and asked Daniel Cheng to be in charge of the story board work, he agreed to do it. Kristen then said there were a lot of tutorials on setting up cameras in Unreal and a class could be helpful as well.

David then directed the question towards Chris, he said he is seeing more integration between cinematics and in game teams. He then said the two pipelines are different but students doing either is great experience.

James then suggested Jason might have some good advice as the company he owns, does both. Jason introduced himself and David caught him up on the GAD courses. David then explained that some students at Rio were interested in film more than games, and that he has predominantly focused in games but that Daniel was excellent at boards and more traditional cinematic work and has been well received by those students who prefer Film and TV. James thought it was great that Daniel was a great counterpoint as an instructor. Daniel then asked James and Jason about drawing out poses before they work on the 3D character and did they feel like it was beneficial. James then said it might be for students but that he currently didn't draw out anything but just went straight to posing his 3D character. Daniel said that when he was Deviation he had spent a good bit of time storyboarding out action sequences so the leads could see some of the new ideas for the new tech stuff they wanted to implement. James then explained how he had to do something similar while working on some of the recent Diablo cinematics, and he enjoyed the storyboarding. Jason said he rarely drew anything anymore, but that students might benefit from it because it could help them in getting there point across. James said he agreed and more drawing and deliberate focusing and research would be helpful and improve students' work. David then asked Hikari if she had any thoughts, she said yes. Hikari said she was put in charge of the Xbox summer showcase, and she was supposed to help the trailer team put polish on the game play footage that was going to be in the trailer. She believes that dealing with Unreal and cinematics while she was in school had really helped her succeed with this professional assignment.

David then asked about the assignments in the ANIM 130 game modeling course and should they be updated. David said Eric Elder, the person in charge of the LA game proposal did like the course and it was important to the new GAD classes. David described his assignments and the programs he used like Maya and Painter and Unreal. David said that some students seemed be de-motivated if it was an assignment that was to extensive and had multiple lectures. He was wondering if he was asking to much of students or if his assignments were still relevant. Kristen said the simple things like the crate and barrel approach was good but that her studio was using Nanite and it allowed the artists to use a ton of polygon. She said her team said referred to her clean and efficient geometry as old school and that if she was to put it into the engine it actually ran slower than the higher res models with geometry that would have been considered unclean. So students moving forward could use much higher poly models and not worry about being clean. Mike said he is still sticking to the basic fundamentals for efficient models and

that they weren't using Nanite. Mike then said the game he was working on required him to model cleanly and efficiently in order to keep the frame rate up in game. Mike said that he didn't think that the assignments needed to be changed but students could experiment with higher resolution models. Tri said the process was more important the than higher resolution art work. When students try modeling higher there will be a new set of problems such as unwrapping a higher res model and Normal issues. Tri felt the lower res cleaner models were still important. Chris said Nanite was not the usual for teams, he believed that the traditional method of modeling low was important. Hikari said she agreed with Chris and that simple approach to lower res models and unwrapping was important as a student starting out. She said her project was using Nanite but that not all engines and games would use it and it was important to learn those basic simple modeling techniques. David asked Hikari if she felt like she could teach the GAD 101 course in Design, she said she had not focused on game design, but had taken a couple of courses in school but she was predominantly a tech artist.

David then asked the committee about how much remote work was going on and were studios moving back into the studios. James said he felt like its mixed right now, and that studios were probably going to start assessing weather artists were better working remote or on sight and he felt it would level out to some sort of hybrid mix but wasn't sure exactly where it would land. Daniel said that he had seen some studios start mandating to working on sight. Daniel said he has started to see a trend of studios starting to want people on sight. Mike said EA supports hybrid system, he said during COVID that the studios had hired a lot of artists that weren't living in the same state as the physical studios so he felt like that it would be hard to pull all employees into the studio. Tri said it was a mix at Meta, he said that new hires were being asked to work on sight to get use to the studio and then maybe a hybrid approach to work could be an option. Jason said that he felt that your experience was playing factor in this and that employers were shifting from some of the higher salaries and employees working remote. James added that he thought it also depended on how good you were as well. He said he had an out of state employee that was good and he worked well remote. Chris said that he felt like studios would eventually moved to on sight work. Chris said he felt like students would be asked to be on sight. Hikari said her school was done a lot on line and she was liking going into the office. Kristen said she works at very flexible studio that has a small office space available for team members to come in work at but that a hybrid option is what most people are using and she is fully remote. She then sad that she has seen studios ask all there employees to com back in and some startups promise remote work and then ask the employees to come in after they start and to take a pay cut if they don't to help make up the cost for empty office space. Mike says he has seen EA offer free food and remodeling the office as an approach to making people return to the office. James said that he felt people were more productive on sight but that some artists did well remote, it just depends on the individuals work ethic. James said at Blizzard they ask you to come in but the Leads don't enforce this and tell the team members to work how they feel is best. Jason said he believed that the first few years of an artist's career is formative. It's important to probably work on sight so you end up being more involved and collaborate with other artist, that this was important as well as being aware of anything that you might doing wrong.

David then asked about how much outsourcing was going on. James said there was a lot of outsourcing going on but it was with companies like Jason's and that he might be able to answer the question best. Jason said most of his clients half of the worked they do outsourced. But for students should look at the remote aspect and out sourcing is a good thing. Chris added that the quality of the outsourcing many times has not been there and that his team has to fix a lot of the outsourcing work. He added that his

team never really embraced outsourcing, but he knows of games that used it heavily. Hikari said that Obsidian was experiencing this quality issue as well and her team had to fix a lot of subpar work. She felt like students shouldn't worry about outsourcing because of this reason. Mike said that during the development of Apex Legends that they had hired on a Vancouver team to help produce all the assets needed for the game. Then they started in sourcing from within EA to help out and then they will look outside of the studio to help out. James added that he thought it was better because of the live service games like Diablo, he believes that there are more jobs and that studios will outsource to in the states. Kristen also added that there was a new Respawn Wisconsin to help out and her team will eventually look at outsourcing, Mike said there are new jobs because of this called outsource managers.

David then asked about the new positions for entry level artists. Then commented on Kristen who had emailed her response to this question. Added here

Hi Dave,
I know we'll cover this in the Advisory Board meeting but I came across these websites lately and thought it was interesting to see a big change up for this question:

5. Are there any new types of positions that are currently opening for entry level artists?

The answer is yes, definitely! In fact things are looking like they cater a lot more to specialized fields than they have in previous years which opens up a lot of doors for beginning game developers. Other board members here may have seen some of these specific titles before for interns, but the following are newer to me for these levels:

- **Character Technical Art Intern** *(vs. regular Technical Art Intern or Character Art Intern - Sony Santa Monica)*
- **Development Support Intern** *(aka a QA intern which is not typically seen before - Insomniac Games)*
- **Lighting Intern** *(vs. regular Art Intern - Respawn Ent)*
- **Mission Designer Intern** *(vs. regular Design Intern - Respawn Ent)*
- **Production Intern - Character Creation** *(vs. regular Art Intern or regular Production Intern - Sony Santa Monica)*
- **Production Intern - Playtest** *(vs. regular Production Intern - Sony Santa Monica)*
- **Product Manager Intern** *(vs. regular Marketing Intern but this position not usually seen at Respawn before - Respawn Ent)*
- **Rigging Intern** *(vs. regular Technical Art Intern - Insomniac Games, Respawn Ent)*
- **Technical Design Intern** or **Technical Game Design Intern** *(vs. regular Design Intern - Sony Santa Monica, Respawn Ent)*
- **Technical Experience Designer Intern** *(vs. regular Design Intern - Respawn Ent)*
- **UI/UX Design Intern** *(vs. regular Art Intern or regular Design Intern - Respawn Ent)*
- **Writing Intern** *(not typically seen before - Respawn Ent)*

Sources:
Sony Santa Monica's current internship program page shows 10 open spots:
https://sms.playstation.com/careers/internship

Insomniac Games' annual internship page with 6 spots:
https://insomniac.games/careers/

Respawn Entertainment internship job postings with 15 spots:
https://www.respawn.com/internships

Compulsion Games (located in Montreal Canada and owned by Microsoft) has 4 spots but no "new" job titles:
https://compulsiongames.bamboohr.com/careers

Just seeing a trend in the bigger studios where beginning level positions are more focused on certain skill sets or broken down further into disciplines. I think it's because games just keep getting bigger with higher expectations so the need for specialized help is present.

It was actually hard for me to find any smaller companies that have internships going right now aside from Compulsion Games but perhaps it's because most usually do a summer program (like Obsidian Entertainment)? It's also worth mentioning that a ton of small startup game companies have popped up and announced themselves within the last several years while lots of giant corporations have bought out everything else. That could easily affect any smaller studios needing interns since they might not have the budget, and/or aren't far enough in production of the project to need interns yet.

Anyhow this was just my opinion and potential talking points to discuss. I'm very much looking forward to hearing about other peoples' perspectives at our meeting. :)

-Kristen

Then a response by Andy Krelle

To echo some notes that Kristen made previously, it does seem like roles are getting defined more specifically. UI/UX has traditionally been considered one role but is starting to be recognized by studios as the two roles distinct roles. Some smaller studios are now hiring dedicated texture artists.
Tech Art continues to be an omnibus title, but people are able to define what type of Tech Artist they are.
That said, it seems like small studios recognize the different roles, but want people that can do more of them.

Hikari added that Tech art specifically character, is what she is seeing internships for. Also, fur cloth and scripts for character artists, and she says fewer environment art technicians. David asked about rigging and she said yes rigging.

Mike said his team was looking to hire a concept art intern, support the concept art team. James said Blizzard has a lot of internship opportunities. Chris said any new jobs he is seeing appear to be more specialization and tech art. He recommends students who technical to look at this area. Kristen said that it was a good time to be a student because companies seem to break out pages on there sights for internships that in the past may not have been as easily found by graduates. David said Eric Alderman said that Tech Art was a great area to go into as there were jobs available. David then asked are junior artists still in demand. James said yes and many other members agreed.

David then described the MOCAP suite and how he is teaching it in the classes. James then said hand keyed was most important and to make sure students had solid foundation skills in hand keyed animation and David agreed.

David then asked about any new software being used in game development. Chris said that his team was doubling down in the use of Houdini. Chris said Houdini could automate tedious tasks that artists hate and make a pipeline quicker and easier for artists. David then asked about any assignments he could originate using Houdini. Chris said Houdini has a steep learning curve, some artists like it some don't, its more technical. Mike said its more of a Tech Artist tool, Kristen agreed and said she wasn't as comfortable with Houdini. Kristen said that some concept artists are using it though. David asked Daniel if he was using it at all. Daniel said he new of an artist Magnus Larson and posted his work in the Chat because it was impressive.

https://www.artstation.com/magnusl3d

Hikari said she had used it and liked it and talked about a few example assignments she did in school with it. Jason said that Unreal has some new Unreal features for animation and that it will attempt to take over the job of animating as well.

Hikari said that there was some new Unreal procedural content tools which Obsidian is looking at but they are similar to Houdini. Kristen said that some of the artists at her studio were using the modeling tools in Unreal as well.

David remarked that he had seen tools for animation in Unreal and that they were expanding and trying to replace animation tools in programs like Maya. Jason said that programs like Maya were still the most important but to keep an eye on the new stuff in Unreal regarding animation.

David then asked the board how they felt about AI and how they believed it would impact the Game industry. Mike responded that he had heard a rumor that a AAA studio had fired a Concept artist, then chose to go with AI instead, he said he wasn't sure if it was true though and the style of the game was hyper real. He then talked about 4 door and they used AI for their work and that it seemed cool. He said his team if they used it at all it was experimentally used. Andy came late and introduced himself, he said AI was just a tool and he didn't feel like it was replacing an artist. They used at Niantic and they were restricted from using it for final artwork but could be used for inspiration and new ideas and pitches. He believed students should learn to use it. James said they are writing a tool for lip-sync animation because animators don't like doing this type of work. He said that the tool still have to have an artists check the work, he said that it's a tool and he agreed with Andy. Chris said the term AI covers a multiple things, he talked about Mid Journey and stable diffusion and that the technology was moving faster than the ethical and legal issues are. He used it and didn't like the way he felt about it. He did feel that no one was being fired because f it bur he also said that he didn't see many new concept artists being hired. He said he sees material artist as being possibly being replaced, and its moving faster than we think and he believes its naive to think it's not going to change things and that no one's job is in danger. He said he could not give me an answer truthfully. Daniel said it was scary, a lot of it is tough because it could be demotivating for students when trying to teach them things that AI does well. Things like perspective may not be something students will want to tackle because of it. Daniel said that he had experimented with Mid Journey and I was amazing, he believed the money people in studios will expect artists to generate 20 concepts per week versus one concept per week. He believed that Concept artists will have

to work with it in more of an outsource manager type approach. Daniel said the legality of it was stopping studios from using it because it couldn't be copywritten, so a studio wont own the AI generated art. If a corporation can train an AI model with there own property, then it will be perfect for that type of studio. Then remarked about how to use AI in the class room without it disheartening everyone. He said he used it and he felt icky using it and when he went to draw again himself it was tough. Daniel then showed some AI generated art work.

David said that the issue for students working on concepts and there is no way a student can come close to matching AI's bar. David talked about a particular student sculpting in Zbrush and that AI depressed her. Daniel said that the hands were messed up but that it was improving very fast and could generate a character and animate it as well. Daniel said that most of his students at Rio and Otis didn't want to touch this stuff. Kristen said that AI was being used to help generate ideas and there is always going to be humans to control and augment AI work. Mike talks about AI and seeing as cheating and sees photogrammetry as being the same, it's a cheat.

David asked the board about purchasing machines that were strong enough to raytraced Unreal projects. The board all said yes this was a necessity.

Maria asked about any certificates that might be useful in industry for students, the board all agreed that a portfolio was what would help student get a job and not any sort of certification.

The meeting ended at 2:25PM on October 22nd 2023.